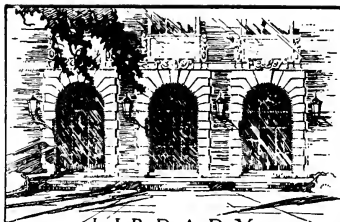


A VILLAGE · HAMPDEN

BY ALGERNON GISSING





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A VILLAGE HAMPDEN.

VOL. II.



A VILLAGE HAMPDEN

BY

ALGERNON GISSING

AUTHOR OF 'BOTH OF THIS PARISH,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A VILLAGE HAMPDEN.

CHAPTER I.

ENTERPRISE.

THE interior of Giles Radway's cottage was of course a contrast to that of Mrs. Bewglass'. The room where young Wayfer and Joice were sitting was the ordinary living-room of the inmates, and the one in which the weekly singing-class was regularly held. It was a combination of kitchen and sitting-room such as most country cottages afford. The stone floor was uncovered, save for a patch-work hearth-rug before the fender, and the chairs were of plain honest ash. There was a windsor arm-chair by the fire,

in which Wayfer was at this moment sitting and from which by a movement of his back he had just knocked the loosely-knitted woollen antimacassar. The room was the whole width of the house, so that there was a small window both in the front and the back. Beneath the latter was a large horse-hair sofa, stretching nearly the whole length of the wall, whilst under the front window was a folding table of dark oak, with both flaps lowered so as to reduce it to its smallest dimensions. In one recess by the fire was a quaint-faced eight-day clock, and in the other was a dark mahogany chest of drawers, with extensive elaboration of brass work round the keyholes and handles. Upon the top of it lay bibles and prayer-books, with some of Giles's prehistoric music. Against the wall above hung a violin in a covering of green baize, and by its side a large brass instrument constantly suggestive of the last trump. Upon the mantelpiece and the

wall above it were several deeply-edged funeral cards of friends and relatives, and faded photographs both framed and unframed.

Joice could not pretend to hide her agitation when Wayfer appeared before her. He never used the ceremony of knocking upon his visits to this house, so that she had little notice of his approach. He had found her sitting alone, without any pretence at occupation, a state of circumstances which naturally heightened the confusion with which she must now at any time have encountered him.

‘Are you alone, Joice?’ he had said, seeing that she was unable to address him.

‘Yes.’

Wayfer had then taken the arm-chair unbidden. He too showed just a suspicion of uneasiness. He crossed his feet at full length before the fender and then drew them up again underneath his chair. Joice at once moved away to get some employ-

ment for her hands. When she again sat down, she was more collected; possibly more so in reality than her companion.

‘Where is your father to-night?’

‘He has gone to Haverton to see Gilbert Such.’

Another silence, during which Wayfer’s legs were again extended to the fender.

‘Is there very much damage done by the fire, Michael?’

‘Yes, more than I care to think about. I hadn’t insured it, like a fool as I am. I was going to do it to-morrow when I went in to market.’

There was something in him which puzzled Joice. Of course the mere fact of his coming to their cottage at all was surprising, after his conduct of the last few weeks, and his statement in the granary last night. But it was something in him personally which attracted her attention now. It intensified her sympathy, although that quality in her would seem to

have been stretched to its utmost before.

‘I suppose you have heard what I was doing whilst my property was burning?’ he asked, with an obvious sneer, presumably at himself.

‘Yes, Michael, I have.’

There was no quaver in her voice. She even raised her eyes at the moment of speaking, notwithstanding the colour of her face.

‘A nice beast you think me, I suppose?’

‘No, I don’t. I am as sorry for it as I know you are yourself.’

Wayfer looked at her with surprise. He was not much acquainted with the workings of sensitive natures, notwithstanding his intercourse with Joice.

‘How do you know I am sorry? I am not sorry, in fact. I am only confoundedly angry. I should like to have thrust my head into the fire the first minute I saw it. I wish I had done too.’

‘It was the first time you had ever done

such a thing, and I believe it will be the last,' remarked Joice, disregarding the latter part of his observation altogether. 'It is no use being angry with yourself.'

'It is use. I made a damned fool of myself the whole night, and isn't that enough to make a fellow angry? You would just cry and have done with it, Joice; but it burns me up. You know you hate me for it.'

'I do nothing of the sort——'

'What, not for anything I did last night?' he cried.

'No,' replied Joice, firmly, although her colour rose again as she recognized the hint.

'I can't make you out,' was Wayfer's reply to the young woman's assertion.

A few minutes' silence followed this distinct step in the conversation. Both were conscious that it was a step, and in one at least of them it wrought a very perceptible tremor. It was weeks since he had made

any such personal remarks, and Joice dared not conjecture what they might portend. Wayfer seemed now to gather himself together into an easier attitude, and when he again spoke there was obviously a greater freedom in his tone.

‘Yes, it is a serious loss, Joice, and one that I shan’t soon get over. But I’m not going to be done; don’t you fear.’

‘I am glad that you take it in this way, Michael; for I know that if you are determined to do a thing nothing can hinder you.’

‘Nothing shall hinder me. But, to tell you the truth, I am glad your father is away, for I came to-night to speak to you.’

Joice kept her eyes resolutely downwards. She was by no means sure that she had heard aright.

‘Yes, I wanted to speak to you, Joice, about—about the way I have treated you lately. It’s no good telling lies. I have

cared more about Ruth Sulby than you for the last few weeks. You have seen it yourself, and you were right that night when you came after me into the dark. But will you forget all about it and let us be as we were before ?'

Joice's heart was beating at a terrible pace, and for a moment she could scarce give him an answer. We know that she was too far gone in love to be conscious of anything like womanly pride, and her training did not prompt in her any suggestion that it ought at least to be shown. She was not at all a coquette, moreover ; so that nothing remained to her but an artless assumption of the feeling which she actually experienced. Wayfer might possibly have made his request in a more sentimental manner,—in which case it would doubtless have been none the less acceptable to Joice ; but just now he had little sentiment within him, and he did not know well how to act it.

‘O, yes, Michael, I will!’ was the girl’s exclamation, when the words could find their way to her lips.

Even Wayfer felt a little surprise at this undisguised expression of forgiveness; for by what was he to judge of her feelings? He had some sort of an inclination towards Ruth Sulby, it is true; had once also towards Joice herself; but this was nothing akin to the passion which Joice felt for him. Wayfer kept his eyes upon the fire.

‘I have been a fool from beginning to end of the business; but I’ve done with it now. I am sorry that I ever left you, Joice, for you are worth a thousand Ruth Sulbys. You can understand what a man means.’

He still sat leaning back in his chair, not in the most approved attitude of a lover; least of all of one who had come to express his contrition and to beg for a restoration to favour. Perhaps Joice was not without some suspicion of this, for her feelings were

never lacking in ardour. She did not betray what she was feeling to him, neither by word nor look. She was very much changed in a week.

The young farmer seemed to consider his courtship complete, for his next remark was upon a different topic. He did put some energy into this.

‘No, I don’t mean to be done, never fear,’ he exclaimed, slapping his hand upon the wooden elbow of the chair. ‘This loss has given me a fresh spurt, and you shall see I’ll be straight again next year. The farm’s not been paying for long enough ; but my father wouldn’t go with the times. His farming was all very well years ago, but things are different now. I believe he has been losing money for years.’

‘I am sure you will succeed in all you do, Michael,’ was Joice’s very natural remark.

‘He never did anything with the dairy, nor the poultry, nor the fruit. Why, half

the rent may be made by those alone. Do you know much about dairying, Joice?’

‘Yes, I make our butter every week; but of course we have only one cow. It is a very little. I could soon get used to it with practice. I have been churning to-day. Would you like to see what I have made, Michael?’

Joice’s eyes were alight with gladness. Her butter happened to be unusually successful this week.

‘O, never mind now,’ was her lover’s reply. ‘I remember that you make it very well. No, don’t bother about it, Joice. It’s first-rate butter, I know; and with practice you would get better. Then I must get a fresh stock of fowls, and I must do a lot more with the pigs.’

Joice sat down again in her chair disappointed. It was not the first of such slights that she had received. Nevertheless, she listened to his projects with delight. After such a remarkable resuscitation of

his affection, she was not to be easily cast down. In a few minutes she had forgotten all about it.

‘It is time to begin it at once, or else I shall have no money left to do it. Of course, I shall want a wife, and you know what one I shall want. I came back to ask you, Joice, if you would marry me?’

He did look up to her as he said it, but continued glued to his chair. The young woman started at the suddenness of the proposition, and then blushed over the whole of her face and neck. She did not immediately answer, and Wayfer’s features showed the slightest alteration.

‘You are not going to say no, Joice, are you?’

She brought her feelings firmly under restraint.

‘Are you sure, Michael, that you love me enough for this?’

‘Why, of course, I do. I have loved you, I forget how long.’

His features softened slightly before her earnest gaze, and in a moment she was kneeling before him. She leaned her elbows upon his knees and looked with blushes up into his face. Then he stooped forward to kiss her and laid a hand upon one of her shoulders.

‘ You will marry me, Joice, won’t you ?’

‘ Yes, Michael, I will marry you whenever you want me.’

O, Joice, Joice, I am afraid it is highly improper to inveigle him into a kiss in that manner. You should have waited for him to cross over to you, surely, else have settled your compact at a distance. Should not he have come kneeling to you ? Perhaps there may be somebody found to excuse you.

Whatever aspect we may severally put upon the matter, no doubt it was fittest as it was. It was a symbol of very deep meaning, which neither of those present could read. The soul of best love is

humility, therefore Joice's true place was on her knees. Wayfer was quite right to remain seated, for that attitude alone could give the expression of his soul. It would have been sacrilege to reverse their positions. If we adjudge worth by refinement of soul, then was Wayfer unworthy to kneel before Joice.

Some more words were exchanged in that attitude, but presently Joice returned to her chair. Her hand was brushed quickly across her eyelids, and she then listened to the continuation of her lover's schemes. He grew quite excited about them, and already seemed to be handling wealth. In the midst of his exuberant devising, Giles Radway came into the cottage. He was not a little taken aback by what he saw there.

Joice jumped from her chair to receive him, and gave her old father a very hearty kiss. He suspected that something had happened. He shook hands with Michael

and then divested himself of his overcoat. At last he took a third chair before the fire.

He listened to Wayfer's explanation with calmness, looking frequently at the face of his daughter. This latter was a picture to gladden his heart, for the alteration in her appearance of late had not escaped the old but vigilant eye. The proposal received his immediate sanction, and then the conversation proceeded as before.

If Giles had expressed unreservedly his opinion, it would not have been wholly in favour of young Wayfer's extensive projects. He was accustomed to old-fashioned habits of thought, and they are generally in favour of gradual progress. The old man was not going to raise his voice against any youthful ardour, for he recognized that the world had changed, and he thought it quite likely that for the new order of things the younger mind was more fitted. There seemed nothing actually unreasonable in

the extent of Wayfer's plans, so that warning was in no way called for. Perhaps he knew too the constitution of a Wayfer, and how futile was the bestowal of advice.

After this settlement of affairs with the father, Michael was anxious to take his departure. Joice's face was again blank at the suggestion, for it was far from late ; but she gave utterance to no protest. His excuses were reasonable, for with these important schemes upon his hands he must indeed be very busy. He should of course come again soon, and indeed as often as he could: but business he must make his first consideration. Yes, it was a necessity, Joice saw that, but at the same time she saw that it was a very ugly one; to her sensitive feelings, at any rate.

Wayfer took his departure accordingly, and left the father and daughter to discuss the incident after their own quiet fashion. It was an affair of vastly greater importance to them than to the young farmer. To the

latter it was an advisable, although rather insignificant, step in the progress of his schemes : schemes in which the placid atmosphere of love had very little place. They had been matured in that November wind, as he battled with it on the hill during the morning, and possibly they partook somewhat of the boisterous energy which characterized it. He walked briskly down the dark village, when he had left that doorway, and did not stop until he reached the threshold of the 'Harrow Inn.'

'He must be here,' he muttered, as he stood to listen by the open door.

The low window on the left hand side was alight, but the blinds were down. A confused sound of tongues came from within, drowning some feeble attempt at song. Nothing definite was distinguishable. Wayfer strode over the two steps into the passage and opened the door into the room whence the sound issued. All eyes were

turned upon him, as he looked across toward a particular corner of the settle, and amongst them those of Christopher Clink-scales who was occupying that corner. This little man never harboured resentment, at least towards any in a better position than himself, and in whom there was any likelihood of friendship. He thought no longer, therefore, of Wayfer's summary dismissal of him in the morning. He was the first to welcome the new-comer to their circle.

'I want you, Clink-scales,' was all the reply that Michael gave to him.

'Come and be comfortable, boy.'

'Come and sit 'e down, Master Wayfer.'

'I am not going to stay to-night. Will you come, Clink-scales?'

'Dunt 'e go, Master Clink-scales. Us'll stand 'e a quart if ye'll stay.'

'Business, business,' replied the elder, who could read the look of determination in Wayfer's face, and was not so short-

sighted as to disregard it. 'Never neglect business, boys.'

Therewith he rose from his cosy corner and lifted his pint pot from the table. It was a new one just brought to him, and the foam was still ebbing round the edges. Instead of raising it to his own lips, he carried it across to Wayfer.

'Come, Michael, just lubricate the wind pipe before you go,' he said, holding out the vessel at arm's length.

'No, I don't want it. Be quick and put it down your throat.'

'Half, then, just for the sake of old acquaintance.'

The pot was thrust close to Wayfer's face.

'I won't have it, I tell you,' he exclaimed in anger, and knocked the thing out of Clinkscales' hand. The liquor was splashed over all the surrounding company, and there was a general outcry of disapproval. There was a look of ludicrous absurdity

upon the face of Clinkscapes, as he gazed at the pewter pot upon the floor.

‘Well, that’s sing’lar,’ he remarked, looking up.

‘Come along, man,’ said Wayfer, pulling him by the arm, ‘you shall have plenty more before you go to bed.’

The two disappeared through the doorway, and the company fell to criticizing the occurrence.

‘Are you sober?’ was the young farmer’s question when they were outside:

‘As sober as old time.’

‘Then come along with me. I want you to sleep up at Sedgecomb. I have a lot to talk over with you.’

‘Is it all right? What’s going to happen?’

‘Right enough, don’t fear. I shouldn’t come for you if it was a case of fighting.’

‘You wouldn’t get me if you did,’ replied the elder, with his customary giggle.

‘But I must send word to the missis.

She'll be in trouble over the lost sheep.'

'Then I'll call in as we go by.'

Wayfer accordingly left word of the projected absence of Christopher, and the two set off for their walk through the dark.

CHAPTER II.

PROJECTS.

CLINKSCALES could get but little from his companion on the road, although he plied him most persistently with every species of interrogative, both direct and indirect. He did not exactly fear Wayfer, for however desperate his recent loss might have made him,—and Clinkscapes could only attribute his present strange resolute conduct to this disaster,—the old man could not see in what way he himself could have incurred any of his resentment on account of it. Wayfer was more determined than usual, without a doubt; that wanton waste of a pint of good liquor was sufficiently strong and grievous evidence of that.

Clinkscale could not but think of that with a sigh. Whenever it flashed across his mind, it banished for the moment all other thoughts.

Wayfer strode away through the darkness, as though he had a limited time in which to reach his house. The elder man had kept up with him as well as he could for a time, having occasionally to break into a trot to reduce the distance between them; but at last he was fairly out of breath. He stood still in the middle of the road, and called out,

‘Hang it, Michael, I can go no further. I’ve never been in training for the Derby, although seemingly you have.’

Wayfer stopped and came back to him.

‘This is a fine chase to bring a man through the dark, and may be for a fool’s errand at the last. Is it reasonable?’

The farmer was actually led into a species of laughter, although it was a commodity in which he seldom dealt.

‘Reasonable enough, you shall see. But I’m not in a particular hurry.’

‘I don’t know what you call partic’lar, but this seems partic’lar enough for me. I can’t do it.’

They went on more slowly after that, Clinkscapes clinging to his companion’s arm. Christopher was not an athletic man, nor was he much given to night walking even of a leisurely kind. He preferred to be abroad in the daylight. The wind, however, was not now so high as it had been, so that his trials were not of the very worst description. A spot of rain fell occasionally upon his face, but it showed no signs of becoming a serious inconvenience. It merely helped him to sharpen his pace.

Both were glad enough to reach the farmyard, and Clinkscapes for his part did not hesitate to say so. He forgot the trifling annoyances of the walk thither in the prospect of a comfortable night. Wayfer was

always liberal enough under his own roof, and this particular visitor never failed to avail himself of the liberality to the utmost. When in the house, the farmer gave an order to the two women who were sitting before the large fire there, which further added to the satisfaction of Clinkscapes. He had bidden a fire be put in the large front sitting-room, and the supper which lay spread upon the table, with the addition of some hot mutton chops, be removed thither.

Christopher rubbed his hands complacently as he heard it, and abandoned himself to the enjoyment of the situation. The younger woman at once got a large coal shovel from beside the fender, and poked a quantity of live embers on to it from between the lower bars of the grate. With this she hurried away to the sitting-room, making Clinkscapes cough with the trail of smoke which she left; then she came back for chips of wood and the bellows.

She very soon had a good fire kindled.

The room into which the two men went smelt very musty and cold. It was too large to offer any promise of comfort, and especially in its present scantily furnished condition. The light paper upon the outside walls and in some of the corners besides, showed dark patches of discolouring from the damp; and the low long mullioned windows were but scarcely covered by the limp white blinds which swayed outwards to the moaning of the wind. Clinkscale pulled a chair as near to the fire as he could, and thrust his feet entirely within the fender. Wayfer walked to and fro in the room.

The atmosphere was greatly improved by the savoury odours of supper, and Clinkscale was tempted by them from the hearth-stone. His eyes fairly twinkled with pleasure as he took his seat at the table, and poured out a glassful of ale. His host made a remark as he did so which

made him start for a moment, but he was too exhilarated to be much affected by it.

‘That’s all you are going to have, Clinky, until we have discussed the plans.’

The other replied with a pretended grumble. Plans, plans—his friend talked so much about these plans, but was uncommonly slow in coming to them. If his ale really depended upon them, Christopher cared not how soon they were broached. He said as much when he had finished his first chop and was handing his plate for another.

‘Let’s have these plans, Michael. Your own mutton? Uncommonly good. Just a little of that moisture.’

At the second chop Wayfer did show signs of divulging his weighty secrets. Perhaps he had waited till then in order to test thoroughly the frame of mind of his companion, and to judge whether he was in a position to give the whole unclouded expanse of his intellect to the

consideration of those momentous concerns. He advanced gradually.

‘ You have been very fond of telling me to “enlarge my scope,” Clinkscapes, and to be dissatisfied with the “stagnation of life” in this parish;—aren’t those the right words?—What would you say if I am going to follow your advice?’

‘ You’re not going to leave the parish, Wayfer?’ was the reply, with every indication of concern.

‘ What if I am? Isn’t that what you advised?’

‘ Shouldn’t leave the parish. Make this a centre for some large agricultural enterprise.’

‘ So that you may not lose your suppers, eh? Will you provide the capital?’

‘ I’ll draw up the scheme, and act as secretary or managing director at a reasonable salary——’

‘ You needn’t take the trouble, for I’ve drawn it up myself. You might be in-

clined to do it on too large a scale, Clinky, for my liking; and then land me in the bankruptcy court, of which you are so fond yourself, but which isn't in my line, I can tell you. But I am not going to leave the parish.'

'Far better not. But your scheme, Michael?' Clinkscales raised his burdened fork to his lips as he spoke.

'But I thought you advised us to destroy all the capitalists, to——'

'Your schemes, Michael,—come to the point!' cried the elder, with his mouth full and his eyes fixed upon his plate.

'To divide the land and the capital; make small holdings, allotments——'

'Damn the allotments, boy. What's your scheme? Have you got one or not?'

'Well, then, it's this. I have found out, Clinkscales, that unless I can make more money in a year or two I shall break. That cursed fire last night has brought me to my senses. I am going to pay more

attention to the small things on the farm, the dairy, poultry, pigs, &c.'

Clinkscales looked at him with a frown of disappointment.

'Small things! Do you think you'll make your rent out of *them* ?'

'You don't know anything about it. I know I can make a good deal if things are properly managed. I am going to do the retail business ; sell my own goods directly to the public and get the shop-keepers' profits as well as my own.'

His companion looked more hopeful for a moment ; but again relapsed.

'What can you do in Shipcombe?' he grumbled. 'There are no shop-keepers' profits for you to get.'

'No, but there are in Dormantley, aren't there? I am going to open a shop there on the 1st of January.'

Christopher sat back in his chair, with raised eyebrows.

'There's that shop in the High Street,'

Wayfer continued ; ‘ next to Johnson’s, has been empty for six months, and I can get it dirt cheap. I am going over to get it to-morrow.’

‘ Come, come, Michael, you’re a brick, and that’s a truism.’

‘ I shall begin it in a small way with butter, cheese, eggs, fowls on one side, and bacon and ham on the other.’

‘ Call it “The Cotswold Farm Stores,” ’ cried Clinkscapes, with an alacrity which showed the title must have been in his mind for years. ‘ You must have the word Stores; it catches the public like a magnet. But you’ll want a manager, Michael?’

‘ Wait a bit. You think the thing will do, do you?’

‘ Bound to do. I could make such a thing swim in six months. I could manage——’

‘ If the thing went, I could push it to no end of a size. I should add a grain and flour department, then fruit and vegetables,

then butchering. I might open a branch in Birmingham and Gloucester and other places.'

'Michael, you're a genius, and that's a truism!' said Clinkscales, holding out his hand to be clasped. 'Nothing but a born genius. I have had the idea myself for years; but I had no capital. But for a manager I——'

'What if I asked you to be manager?'

'You'd put the success of the thing beyond question, man,' was the reply. 'I am made for the place.'

'And be drunk under the counter all day.'

'Nay, nay, Michael, no libel. I and my missis could do the thing cheaply, don't you see? I could pay attention to the advertisements. Most important part. You want a man of some intellect, I can tell you.'

'Well, let 'em clear this table and then they can go to bed,' said Wayfer, getting

up from his chair. 'And we'll sit and talk. I am rather doubtful about the manager.'

He called from the doorway, and the servant came with the tray.

'Bring the jug full of beer before you go,' he said to her, as he sat down before the fire.

Clinkscapes rescued his glass from the table and let it rest upon his knee where he was sitting. He showed quite remarkable animation in his countenance as he gazed into the fire, awaiting the resumption of the conversation. The jug of beer was brought and placed over against Clinkscapes. It was noticeable that Wayfer had refused to keep his own glass for further use after supper. He had had but one half pint with the meal. Clinkscapes did not venture upon a second instalment of raillery upon the subject. After all, it meant a larger share of liquor for himself.

The large fire had as yet but little effect

upon the atmosphere of the room, beyond bringing out the vapours from the damp walls and furniture. Neither of the men had any tendency to valetudinarianism, else their discomfort would have been extreme. Comfort is such a relative quantity that it is quite possible they found the room the very embodiment of it. It was certainly an advance upon their last night's quarters, when one had had a hayrick alone and the other a quick-hedge to shelter him from the night blast of November. Whether they felt it or no, it is certain that a mist must have been rising up around them, like that over the stubble fields when first touched by the sun upon a sharp morning in September.

‘It ’ll do, then?’ repeated Wayfer, when they were again alone.

‘About the management now, Michael.’

‘Well, I meant to ask you to be manager at first, upon no salary but the rent, until

we see how things go. If after the first twelve months the concern showed that it would pay, we would settle a reasonable salary, and you should have a share of the first year's profits.'

'Twelve months! How am I to live that time?'

'How do you live now? That's my offer; if you don't like it, leave it. It is reasonable enough, for if the affair flourishes you will at last flourish with it; and if it don't I only lose. You won't lose a farthing. Will you take the place?'

'Of course I will, Michael. At least I'll talk to the missis about it. If she's stubborn, you must tackle her yourself.'

'There's a good dwelling-house over the shop, I believe; but I've not looked at it yet. I'll cart your furniture there for you, of course: so that you'll have no expense. But mind, Clinkscapes, you'll have to do some work. I shall overlook everything

myself, and you and your wife will keep the shop. If I hear of you going out drinking, you'll clear out.'

'Not much to drink on,' grumbled Clink-scales. 'But come, don't begin by insulting a fellow; I shall take to it as if it was my own concern. Your interests shall be mine. How much will you allow for advertising?'

'I have not settled those details yet. I only thought of the scheme this morning. I want to talk with you about these things, if you accept the position I offer.'

'Of course I do. We'll settle the missis somehow between us.'

The men then proceeded to discuss the practical details of the undertaking with a minuteness into which we need not follow them. Wayfer got a piece of paper and a pencil, and tabulated his figures in a very business-like way. It was remarkable what an amount of mercantile aptitude the two men displayed, when their minds were

fully concentrated upon the matter. When Clinkscapes got his notions pruned down to the reasonable dimensions of the scheme to which Wayfer would alone give his consent, he showed a very shrewd knowledge of the best method of conducting it. The young farmer, who was a business man by instinct as well as training, soon saw that he had not been deceived in his odd friend. Moreover, Clinkscapes was the only man certainly whom he could find to undertake the duties required of him upon such economical terms ; and this of course was an important item in the floating of the concern, seeing the very limited capital upon which they had to work. All initial outlay must be minimized.

One of the most important parts of the consideration, to Wayfer at any rate, was the getting a scrupulously accurate account of what amount would have to be disbursed in obtaining not only the stock wherewith to open the premises, but also

that which was calculated to be necessary for the future working of the establishment. For some time, by far the greater portion of the produce itself would have to be bought from other producers, for Wayfer's farm was at present quite inadequate to the requirements. The more permanent part of the investment would be the purchase of several fresh cows and pigs; a new stock of fowls, geese, and turkeys; and altogether a renovation of all dairy implements and fittings.

Upon going into this part of the matter, they very soon found that they had not sufficient information wherewith to come to conclusions. Many notes had to be made which necessitated outside investigation, and these made Michael Wayfer unreasonably impatient. He wanted to settle off-hand every detail of his adventurous scheme, and would have liked very much if possible to have opened his shop on the morrow.

The consultation lasted for some hours, and it was fully midnight before any thought of bringing it to an end occurred to either of the two men. As was naturally to be expected, Clinkscale was the one to whom the thought first came, and when the beer was finished and he saw a suitable opportunity, he broadly hinted at it. His night under the hayrick had not been of such exceptional satisfaction that he could afford to pass its successor without any sleep at all.

Wayfer received it impatiently at first, but when he was obliged to confess to himself that they were doing nothing whatever by remaining, he agreed to a retirement for the night.

Excited although both of them were by the long discussion they had had, theirs were not natures to be easily deprived of sleep. They could generally throw off their thoughts with their garments, and to-night hardly proved any exception to

the rule. Wayfer perhaps lay for a quarter of an hour listening to the rain beating against his window and the tapping of a twig upon the panes, but at last he grew oblivious to the sound, and the latest watcher of the household was at rest.

Late as was the hour of his retirement, the young farmer rose at his accustomed time in the morning. He left his bed-room very soon after the clock had struck six, and went to see after the men in the stables. From thence he crossed over to the cowhouse and talked with the shepherd who was milking. Their talk lasted for more than half-an-hour, and from it Michael returned to the house where his breakfast lay awaiting him. When Clink-scales appeared at something after nine, Wayfer was already in the High Street of the market town.

He went first to inspect the vacant premises of which he had spoken and which he meant to be the centre of his enterprise.

As it proved, these hardly gave him unalloyed satisfaction. They had not before been used for any business connected with food, so that the appointments were but indifferently adapted to such a stock. However, the quick eye of Wayfer saw readily how great improvements could be effected, with but little difficulty and expense, and he had soon summoned the landlord to consult. This gentleman chanced to be a flourishing draper whose shop adjoined the premises in question. He was a staunch friend to any judicious speculation, for by it alone had he reached his own present position, and he entered into Wayfer's plans most good-naturedly. After little more than an hour's consultation they had decided upon the requisite alterations, and also the share which each should bear in the expenses. A week was allowed the young farmer for consideration, before the actual completion of their compact, but at the end of that time he pro-

mised to come with his determination. They parted in a state of mutual satisfaction.

Other steps in Michael's investigations seemed to prove as satisfactory as this first, for when he returned to his house about mid-day he showed quite an unusual exhilaration.

But there was a change in him. In one night he had stepped from youth to resolute full-grown manhood. It was inevitable that the result of that night should have exercised some decided influence upon his life. The glove had been flung at his feet, and he must either have taken it up in the spirit he did, or have turned his face from it and have silently sunk without striking a blow. His disposition was pre-eminently pugnacious. He was not a man to cower before material challenge, and sink, say, with a beer-drinking bankrupt. Some very determined defiance was in fact rather needful for him; without it he was apt to

remain ignorant of his strength. Circumstances were pointing out to him his natural course, and he was not blind to the upraised finger. That trivial skirmish with matters of sentiment had ended his warfare in that direction, and he could see stretching out before him the field of battle for which alone he felt in any way equipped.

CHAPTER III.

THE LEGACY AGAIN.

IT was hardly to be expected that one of the temperament of Joice Radway could keep her good news locked up in her own palpitating bosom. For twenty-four hours she actually did so, but the next night did she take her way up to the school to inform the school-mistress of the solution of her difficulties, and bid her share in her rejoicing. It naturally caused Miss Sulby no little surprise.

She gave nothing but congratulation to her excited informant so long as she was with her, for she had learned the impossibility of argument with Joice upon this one

particular point, and it seemed but fruitless vexation of spirit to impart to her the lugubrious thoughts which had instinctively occurred to herself. Clearly nothing would move her friend's infatuation, so that it seemed wisest to make the best of the situation in the hope that it might end better than Ruth now was able to expect.

As has been already remarked, Miss Sulby was an idealist in matters of sentiment. Marriage was a very sacred matter to her, and any rude handling of the institution concerned her deeply. It seemed to her that there was going to be an instance of it in the case of Michael Wayfer. She could not pretend to understand him.

Joice only stayed with her a few minutes, but when she had gone Ruth could not rid her mind of the ugly impression. It seemed to her that Joice was hugging a hideous chimera, and she could foresee nothing but disaster from the contact. She

was effectually disturbed in her studies for that night, and simply sat brooding in her chair. The wind was moaning dismally, and, in these few minutes since Joice had left, the rain had begun to be flung in handfuls against the window. They seemed fit accompaniments to the thoughts which she revolved. Presently a gust of wind brought a swirl of rain-drops upon the panes, making the glass yield a dull kind of music to their strokes, which fascinated the listener in her present pensive mood. She raised her head at the sound and eagerly awaited its repetition. For some seconds it was still.

It was not the rain or wind that made her rise up from her chair, and yet it was something she had heard. The wind never rattled the gate like that, not in the highest gale. It must be Joice returned, she thought, and at once hastened to let the foolish child in. She opened the door and met the rain directly in her face.

But that was not Joice's voice which called her, and yet it seemed one she knew.

'O Dash, do be quiet! Who is it?' she cried.

'Open the gate, Miss Sulby. I be wet to the skin.'

'Mrs. Riley!' exclaimed Ruth, when she stood at the gate. 'Do you want to shelter?'

'Iss, I want to come in, child. Luck sharp.'

Ruth did as she was bidden without further parley. She herself would have been wet through if she had stood there long, and she was unable to deny a shelter to the woman. They both ran into the house. Ruth shut the door behind them, directing Mrs. Riley into the room. The visitor, however, hesitated to go forward.

'I be a-dripping wet, Miss Sulby. Let me go into the kitchen. I know what a mess wet traipsing feet makes in a house.

Besides, I bent going to stay but a minute or two.'

'Then I'll get a candle,' said Ruth. 'There's no fire in the kitchen.'

'That'll make no odds.'

'Take off your wet waterproof, Mrs. Riley,' said Miss Sulby, when they were in the kitchen, and she saw the state of her visitor. 'You won't be wet underneath; you can stay and get warm. Most likely it is only a passing storm; you can't set off in this. Listen to it on the window.'

'You be very kind, miss; but I won't stay. I only came to——'

'Have you to walk to Sandy Brook to-night?'

'Yiss, I 'ev. I ha' comed o' purpose to bring you this money. It worrits my life out.'

'Then you are not going back yet. There!' she cried, relieving the portly dame of her wet waterproof. 'Get your boots off and we can get all the things dry

before you set off. The rain will be over soon.'

'Now dunt 'e put a match to that fire,' cried Mrs. Riley, darting forward. She was too late, however to prevent it, for the paper already blazed up around the bars. 'I 'udn't ha' come in if I'd thought as you'd do this; a-putting yourself all about. I med ha' given it you over the railings, but I thought mebbe you wouldn't take it in that way.'

'It is not putting me about at all. The fire was all ready. They'll dry sooner here, for the other grate is so small. Wait, I have got some large slippers which will do for you. Now, come into the other room and get warm, and you can tell me all you wish to.'

'Why, bless me!' cried Mrs. Riley in astonishment, as she followed Ruth into the sitting-room. 'I med be a friend to 'e the way you fuss. Eeh! what a comfortable room.'

‘Sit down there, and I’ll just see to the fire.’

Ruth went back to the kitchen and saw that the fire was all right. She put on the kettle and then returned to her visitor.

‘Now, then, come and sit down yourself. You’ve no need to put yourself about for I, I’m sure. I ’ev come to bring you this money. I can’t keep it no longer. I’ve had no peace, day and night, since I had it, and if ’e wunt take it I’ll put it all in this fire, so there! It have brought all kind of disaster along with it. I must have been overseen when I took it. Us’ll be ruined altogether if I keep it a day longer.’

‘What disasters has it caused you?’ asked Ruth, with some curiosity.

‘All manner. My ’usband seems a-getting wrong in his head, and everything goes wrong.’

It was impossible to doubt the seriousness of the woman. She had turned up

the skirt of her dress over her knees, and now asked Miss Sulby for some scissors. They were handed to her, and she at once cut the seam of the lining ; she pulled out the bank notes when the aperture was large enough to admit her hand. She counted them and threw them upon the table, two hundred pounds. Miss Sulby looked on in silence.

‘There, I ’ev done wi’ yer,’ she cried, apparently addressing the money.

‘But, if things go wrong with you, you will want the money all the more.’

‘That be what my ’usband says, but I’ll not listen to it. If it have brought the wrong wi’ keeping it in here, it bent likely to bring right by spending it. I’ll go to the work-us first.’

Strange to say, Ruth’s eyes sparkled at the sight of this money which she hitherto had so persistently flung from her: her cheeks were flushed as she spoke about it.

‘But I shall not keep it for myself, if you leave it with me,’ she said.

‘Do what you like with it,’ was the reply; but then with a sudden look apparently of malevolence, ‘excepting you give it to any of they others. I ’ud rather burn it than that.’

‘I will not give it to any of them.’

‘Then do what you like with it. ’T be yours and not mine.’

Ruth continued to look at the notes as they lay upon the table, but hesitated to touch them. Was it possible that there was a contest going on in that strictly disciplined mind? Was there, after all, wavering in those self-denying resolutions? Ruth, hast thou too a vulnerable point, a point assailable by this heap of filthy lucre? So obviously filthy, too, the greater portion of it; mere local notes, black and greasy, from the pockets of butchers and dealers in live stock! Shining gold had been different.

Apparently so. Her hand trembles as she takes it; her eyes sparkle. Indications of delight, surely.

Ruth said nothing as she put the notes in her writing-desk. Mrs. Riley heaved a sigh of relief when the key was turned, and announced that she should be better.

Again the schoolmistress gave an apology for going to the kitchen fire. She was away for a few minutes, and when she returned she bore a tray in her hands.

‘ Bless me, miss !’

‘ I thought you might like a cup of tea, Mrs. Riley, before you go. It is a long cold walk. What made you come such a dreadful night? You did not come purposely for this?’

‘ Iss, I did. I ’ad made up my mind to make you take it on the dance night, but it was so public. Since then, as I tell you, my ’usband ’ev been so queer that I’ve been half afraid of un, and that be a thing as *I* evn’t said, not since I married un.

To-night after tea us were like to have a difference. Ur got a-talking about this money, and I thought as ur'd take it from me by main violence. But ur be a man of little sperrit, and I quelled un. However, I says to myself, "I unt sleep another night with this about me," so I comed here straight. Ur'd have had it afore, I believe, if ur'd known where I kep it.'

Ruth had poured out a cup of tea and put it before her visitor, and she was now cutting some bread and butter.

'Put milk and sugar in yourself, Mrs. Riley.'

The woman did as she was bid in silence. When the school-mistress put the plate of bread and butter before her she simply exclaimed, 'Well, I never!' and took a piece. She then stared at her hostess for some seconds, not removing her eyes as she began to consume the provision in her hand. The tea was poured into the saucer and a great 'swoop' taken from it, then

again Ruth felt the scrutinizing eyes upon her.

‘Dunt ’e feel lonesome here, Miss Sulby, all by yourself?’

‘O no. I have too much to do to think of being lonely.’

‘I were never so totally deceived in a body as I were in you,’ was the visitor’s next remark, more by way of thinking aloud than of addressing her companion. No reply seemed necessary, so Ruth made none.

‘I s’pose I’d ought to beg your pardon for what were said at the lawyer’s office, said Mrs. Riley, putting down her empty tea-cup. ‘They others were worser than me.’

‘Pray don’t refer to that again. I have forgotten that it ever occurred. Let me fill your cup.’

‘Scemingly you ’ev. Thank you. You’re drinking none yourself.’

‘I had my tea late. Help yourself: you have a long walk.’

Mrs. Riley availed herself of the invitation, and there were again sounds of vigorous mastication. Her eyes were most persistently fixed upon Ruth's face, to the positive discomfort of the latter.

'You be different from most o' the girls as I 'ev had to do with. I wish you'd keep that money for yourself, for you deserve it. A body can talk to you. But be it true as you be a-going to marry that young Michael?'

'No, it is not true,' replied Ruth, with much decision.

'Well, how folks do talk! I thought as it 'ud be a queer affair if you married he. Ur yent fit for you. You'll marry some gentleman, I should think.'

'I haven't thought anything about it,' replied Ruth, smiling, but with a slight increase of colour.

'Of course, not. You be young enough.'

Again a short silence, during which Ruth was subjected to the usual close scrutiny.

‘I feel as if a body could talk to you, Miss Sulby, and I dunt know who else I can say it of. I can’t abide this new parson’s wife wi’ her airs; and her daughter beunt my kind, although her be better than her mother. But I could talk to you, if you ’oodn’t think it imper’ent.’

‘Talk to me? What about?’

‘O about perplexities,—folks do get perplexed at times, whoever they be.’

‘I am a poor one to talk to, I am afraid: but if you think I can ever be of use to you I hope you will talk to me.’

‘I thought you’d say that. Well, I be a-wanting to talk to you now, and it be about my ’usband. Ur’ve always been a poor specimen, but I be afeared as his intellects be a-going altogether.’

‘What a shocking thing! But what makes you think so?’

‘Well, ur’ve always been one as wanted driving. If it hadn’t been for I ur’d ha’ been a day labourer to this minute. But

I saved and made money for un, and got that little farm of Sandy Brook; but ur wouldn't thrive, not for ever so. Ur've got more and more dummle every day. Ur seems to brood over things. Eh, dear! what a job I had to get him to go to Mr. Kimble's dance! It bent the dancing as a body goes for, as I told un; but ur mumbles away, "I dunt want to zee volks." But I made un go and right, too, although ur didn't stay long. Well, would 'e believe me, Miss Sulby, ur've not seemed really right in the head since. Ur wunt speak; ur wunt eat; ur wunt do nothing. It be just "Eess," or "Noa," to iverything as a body says. To-night, as I've already told you, he asked me where that money were; and when I didn't give it to un, ur turned as savage as a mad dog. A thing ur never did afore. It be enough to make a body afeared, for when a animal goes against its natur it do look despt queer. Dunt 'e think so?

‘But if he is worried about his affairs,

as you hinted a few minutes ago, don't you think it likely that he will be moody and ill-humoured without anything being really wrong with his mind ?'

'I've thought o' that, too ; but his affairs hasn't altered since the supper night, and I've got it firmly fixed in my mind as that night ha' changed him.'

'I shouldn't trouble about it, Mrs. Riley,' returned Ruth, who wished to appease the woman so as to put some limit to the interview. 'It is quite likely that an unusual event like that upset him, and as he is a man of the temperament you describe it will take him some time to get into his usual habits again.'

'Well, I hope you may be right, miss ; but it do seem uncommon curious to me. Eh, be that the time ?' cried Mrs. Riley, as her eye caught the clock on the mantelpiece. 'I didn't think it had got on so. I must go, else I don't know what mayn't happen to that man.'

‘You had better stay a little longer—’

‘Nay, I mustn’t. I can hear as the rain be a deal more quieter. I am sure I be much obliged to you for your kindness. You’ll have saved me a bit of rheumatiz, for I was sopping wet. The tea has warmed my inside an’ all : I shall get ’ome comfortable. But my ’usband do worrit me. You may be right, however : p’raps ur’ll come right after a bit. But eeh, Miss Sulby ! if you would but let a body come and talk to you if anything happens wrong ; I’d feel like to ’ev something at my back. I can’t talk to folks in general, but ye’re different. I can talk to you.’

‘I shall be glad to do what I can for you,’ Ruth replied to her, as she would have done to any creature upon earth. ‘But I hope your husband will soon be all right. Do not trouble yourself about it.’

There was much preparation necessary in the kitchen for Mrs. Riley’s departure : getting on saturated boots alone takes some

little time: but at last the good woman stood in readiness at the door with the lighted lantern in her hand. She again thanked Ruth for the reception she had given her; begged her to keep the money for herself; and finally bade her good-night. The rain was but light, and Ruth went out with her visitor to the gate. When the latter had departed, the gate was locked and the school-house barred up for the night.

When the mistress was shut in with her own reflections, she betrayed a good deal of excitement. That desk was again unlocked, and the notes, together with her Savings Bank book, were brought out. The two together gave unmistakable evidence of Ruth being in possession of a sum of two hundred and eighty four pounds, seven shillings, and ninepence. Was the furniture worth all that? The school-mistress could not pretend to much practical knowledge of such matters, but she felt justified in

answering her question in the negative. If it were worth less : why, every stick and straw about the place could she buy, and Mrs. Bewglass would not be one iota the worse ; if it were worth more, surely it could not be worth much more, so that this sum at any rate could purchase the bulk of it. She went to rest with a lighter heart than she had known since Mrs. Bewglass' disclosure. Certain little practical difficulties, which did not resolve themselves at first sight, could be left for further consideration.

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

WHEN Miss Sulby awoke on the following morning, she was aware of there being something unusual upon her mind, before she had actually traced it to the incident of the previous night. When the consciousness of the possession of that very large sum of money had fully dawned upon her, and the various schemes, which had from the first connected themselves with it in her imagination, had assumed a definite form to her mental vision, she rose quickly from her bed, and threw open her lattice window. She suddenly remembered that it was Saturday, and that until the middle

of the afternoon, when some pupil, a neighbouring farmer's daughter, had her music-lesson, she was absolutely free. She consequently scanned the heavens rather carefully, in the hope of drawing from them a promise of a fine day.

There was every sign of a very heavy rain throughout the night. The roads were quite sodden, and showed little channels on every incline in which the stones were laid bare by the surface currents. There was but a very light wind from the south-west, and the rain must have ceased for some hours, as the stones in the school court-yard were mainly dry, showing but a few scattered puddles where the surface was uneven. Dull grey watery clouds overspread the sky, except for a rift in the zenith and another towards the east, which would have given a glimpse of the blue behind but for the fragments of thin misty wrack which constantly floated before them. The air was very raw. Ruth pro-

nounced, nevertheless, that the day would break.

By the time the postman came, shortly after nine, the signs were yet more favourable. Ruth had expected a letter, and it had not come : there was nothing but a newspaper. At the first moment, owing to her disappointment at the non-arrival of her letter, Ruth paid but little attention to the paper. It was not until she was in her room that she looked at the address. When she had seen it, and puzzled for a few seconds over it, her face suddenly altered, and she burst into a merry peal of laughter. She had seen that handwriting before, and had apparently at last recognized it. She tore off the wrapper hastily and unfolded the paper. Yes, it was the *Dormantley Mirror*, as she had expected. She looked eagerly down the columns, but had not to look long. The paper had been so folded that upon its first opening a heavily marked paragraph

would strike the reader's eye. It was under 'Local News,' subdivision 'Shipcombe;' and ran as follows :

'According to time-honoured annual custom, John Kimble, Esq., of the Manor Farm, on Thursday evening last, entertained his work-people and neighbours to a Harvest Supper and Ball. The granary in which the dancing was held was most tastefully decorated with corn, flowers, evergreens, &c., by Mr. Jelf, the much respected gardener at the Manor Farm. In the pleasing task, he received material assistance from the fair hands and artistic insight of Shipcombe's fairest denizens, to wit, the accomplished daughter of the new but highly-esteemed vicar, and the well-trying instructor of the parish youth, the latter of whom by her kindly and gentle disposition has endeared herself to the hearts of every class, denomination, and age with whom she has come in contact. Nine o'clock was the hour appointed for dancing operations to commence, but long before that hour lads and lasses came trooping in from neighbouring villages and farms, their countenances radiant at the prospect of a few hours of harmless diversion. The utmost enthusiasm prevailed at the appearance upon the scene of Mr. and Mrs. Kimble and party, whose advent was the signal for the dance to commence, which was accordingly led off to the popular strains of the "Keel-Row." The music was admirably sustained by Messrs. Radway and Bench. As the evening advanced, the mirth flew fast and furious, the proceedings being frequently enlivened with a song, in which our own representative

creditably sustained a part. Too much praise cannot be bestowed upon the hospitable provider of such popular entertainments, and although we regret to see that they are every year diminishing in number, we hope that in the near future they may again play a not unimportant part in reuniting the different classes of the country populations, in whom there is now-a-days unfortunately noticeable a breach which cannot help but be gravely prejudicial to the interests of all parties. As we surveyed this social gathering on Thursday evening, of which our space alone and not its merits has regulated the length of this account, and as we mused upon the friendly unity there discernible, we could not refrain from exclaiming with a bard of our own town and people :

“ Come, social spirit ! Come upon us, do !
Illumine the hearts of high and eke of low !
Come, I say, come ! And yet again, O come !
Strike evil speech and all dissension dumb ! ”

Ruth read the paragraph through, for the most part with smiles. At the reference to herself she became grave, and exclaimed, ‘ O, what a story ! ’

She had in fact had no hand in the granary decorations ; but doubtless this was a poetical licence on the part of the writer. It was quite harmless, though, and was obviously introduced for the purpose of expressing good will to Ruth her-

self. A thought suddenly flashed across her. She looked hurriedly from the window, and saw that the clouds were breaking up. The sun shone in places on the hillside. He was a lawyer; she would go.

Before throwing the paper down, however, she glanced at a paragraph immediately below the one just quoted, and which had caught her eye as she read the first one. It was short, so we too may see it :

‘RICK FIRES.—Mr. Michael Wayfer of Sedgewcomb has sustained the loss of the whole of this year’s crop of hay and wheat, together with a portion of last year’s, by fire. The outbreak apparently occurred in a large stack of hay, and when viewed in connection with the recent fire at Foxcote it would seem to point to the diabolical work of an incendiary. The Dormantley fire brigade, as well as an eager company of villagers, were soon upon the spot, but owing to the progress made by the fire before discovery their services were of little avail beyond saving the adjoining farm buildings. In a short time all the ricks of hay and wheat were in full blaze, and the whole of the produce was burned to the ground. We regret to hear that the property had not been insured.’

In less than ten minutes Miss Sulby was

walking briskly through the village with an umbrella in her hand and a light macintosh over her arm. The sun shone brightly from a finely clouded sky. The orb was occasionally eclipsed by some majestic fragment of tawny cloud with silver edge and crest. The wide vale presented an ever-varying landscape of alternate light and shade, which seemed to offer particular attractions to the schoolmistress in her walk. When the sun was hidden from her she would gaze upwards for the cause, and as the screening cloud advanced she would try to follow its individual shadow as it travelled across the plain. Golden stubble field and verdant pasture lost their brightness in its path ; whilst that grey-white spire beyond the russet larch plantation, which but a minute before had been so conspicuous an object to the observer, vanished entirely from the landscape. The air was fragrant with the humid breath of earth and wood,

and seemed to sparkle with the loud, shrill song of the defiant robins,—a bird who alone of all his kind shows any reasonable appreciation of the sombre months.

Ruth Sulby went steadily along, noting this and that, and drawing various degrees of pleasure from everything. Now in the sunshine, now in the shade; up hill, down hill; under trees and in the open. Milestone after milestone was passed for a space of nearly two hours: then at last she was in sight of that stately abbey-church, which was justly the pride of the inhabitants of Dormantley. After another mile she stood and listened. It must be twelve o'clock; the chimes were audible. She stood still to listen to them stumbling, in their own sweet way, over that well-loved old air, a particular favourite of her own, 'Drink to me only with thine eyes.' She could not move until they had finished, for her walking interrupted the sound. She followed with the words mentally,

from line to line, until the last was reached, and that she sang aloud :

‘ Not of itself but thee.’

She strained her ears for the reopening, unwilling to believe what she knew to be a fact. She believed that she heard it, whilst she knew that she did not. It was but the reproduction of her brain, a vibration of the music in the memory. The air lingered with her the whole day, but was temporarily interrupted when she entered the market town.

She crossed the bridge, the grey muddy river rolling and eddying beneath, and then she began to ascend the Bridge Street. It was a short but considerable incline, with macadamized roadway and smooth blue pavements for foot passengers. The old gabled upper half of many of the houses, over the modern shop windows below, gave the street a highly picturesque appearance. Shopkeepers stood on their doorsteps, and a handful of people on the

pavement, to look at the timber waggon, laden with two rugged fallen giants, which had come to a standstill when but midway up the hill. Ruth felt the breath of the panting horses, which stood with forefeet by the curb-stone, as she bent to avoid their heads. Doubtless she murmured some expression of sympathy as she passed up the street beyond.

She paid but little heed to the shops her mind being apparently engaged with other things. As she turned the corner into the High Street, there was a horseman in the road, to whom she naturally raised her eyes. She very quickly removed them; for it was none other than the adventurous Wayfer. However, he was in no mood to cause her annoyance, being but too intent upon his schemes. He frowned as he recognised her figure, but never turned to look behind.

This encounter seemed to make Ruth hasten her steps, and she soon reached

that house with the brass plate upon the railings. She felt all that old timidity as she entered, although her errand was of such a vastly different nature from the one which had brought her here before. She had no infuriated relatives to face, no insult to endure. Only the courtly Mr. Philpin to approach, who had shown himself anything but terrible to her. She could not think of him without a smile. She knocked once again upon that well-remembered glass panel, and was answered exactly as before.

There sat Spindles and his boy, as busy as ever with engrossing, but the former could raise his particular grin as he recognized the visitor. Was Mr. Philpin at liberty? Yes, he was; walk upstairs. Ruth did as she was bid.

She had to knock twice before obtaining any response, and when the voice within was heard she was unable to recognize it. A stern authoritative tone was not what

she had been led to expect. It seemed impossible to her that the Mr. Philpin of her acquaintance could command such a tone. What if it were not he? Into what a fix had she got? She timidly opened the door, fully prepared for a shock; but the momentary fright proved to have been needless. Mr. Philpin it was.

The school-mistress was inexperienced in the exigencies of business, so she might well not understand this gentleman. Could it be Mr. Philpin after all? Polite he had been, nay, excessively obsequious upon those former occasions; but how different now! His voice had been gruff and his appearance was no less. He did not raise his face even as she entered, but continued bending over his table, with eyebrows quite unnaturally knit. He had some large document immediately before him, consisting of square sheets apparently fastened at the corner, and he turned them

over one by one with the greatest assiduity, running his finger hastily down each page before he turned it, and muttering to himself. Ruth was vastly impressed by it. He must be immersed in the whole body of the law, she thought, and she was grieved that it had fallen to her lot to disturb him. It must be of superhuman difficulty to get back into such an absorbing current of thought, when prematurely disturbed in it. She knew something of such disturbance, in her own trifling concerns, but how petty compared to this !

It was a pity that Miss Sulby could not have seen this stern man of business as he was when she first knocked. It would have made her easier. Some papers he had then before him certainly, but not this portly abstract of title. It had annihilated them beneath its ponderous bulk. Some expression there had been on those features, without doubt, but it was little akin to this austere visage so disconcert-

ing to the visitor. Ruth was very soon relieved.

A few seconds seemed to vindicate Mr. Philpin's character as a man of business. When he felt assured that the impression was conveyed, he looked up quickly from his papers, with an apology on his tongue.

‘Pardon me, madam— Bless my soul!’ he cried, with a sudden recognition and an instantaneous change of countenance. ‘Is it Miss Sulby that I see before me?’

“or art thou but
A vision of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?”

He laughed so pleasantly, that Ruth felt at liberty to laugh too, and both were instantly at ease. There were more effusive apologies: the client, too, offering some for the terrible interruption she had caused him. He took it with the best of tempers; versatility was the soul of business, of his own profession in particular; and this particular interruption was,—well, he would

not specify. Ruth felt, now, this was Mr. Philpin: the one she had come to see.

When they were seated in their chairs, Miss Sulby lost no time in coming to the object of her visit. Her adviser had difficulty in refraining from a steady gaze into her eyes as she propounded her business, but he did his best.

‘I have come to ask you, Mr. Philpin, some questions about a matter which is causing me a great deal of anxiety. You will be able to explain it all, for I am very ignorant about legal affairs. You know that Mr. Bewglass, the vicar of Shipcombe, died last year,’—Philpin shook his head sympathetically;—‘and now Mrs. Bewglass tells me that the lawyers are demanding nearly five hundred pounds from her. What is it exactly for?’

‘I have heard of the case, Miss Sulby. Dilapidations,—property in a bad state, I understand. When a clergyman dies, the diocesan surveyor inspects all the property

and reports. Proceedings governed by 34 and 35 Vic. cap. 43, and 35 and 36 Vic. cap. 96: may be cited as the Ecclesiastical Dilapidations Acts 1871-2.'

'Then they really can demand all this money, Mr. Philpin?'

'Certainly. In this case, the amount does not seem to be disputed.'

'But what if Mrs. Bewglass is unable to pay it? She has no money.'

'Very painful case, Miss Sulby. I felt it acutely when it was mentioned to me, for I knew Mr. Bewglass well. A better man never lived; we shall not look upon his like again.'

This was no answer to Ruth's question.

'What will they do if the money is not paid?' she repeated.

'Issue *fi. fa.* upon all the effects of the deceased.'

Ruth did not catch the meaning exactly.

'Issue what, Mr. Philpin?'

'Issue *fi. fa.*—but what am I talking

about? Of course, my dear young lady, you don't understand legal technicalities. I mean issue execution upon the effects. The claim is upon the same footing as any other debt.'

Ruth was hardly more enlightened by this lucid explanation.

'Does that mean that they may sell Mrs. Bewglass' furniture?'

'In common parlance, it is quite equivalent to that, my dear Miss Sulby. But I am distressed to see you so troubled about it. I am sure I wish the law was different. I wish I could tell you different.'

'No, no,' said Ruth. 'Of course I only want to know the real truth about the matter. Then Mrs. Bewglass is right. She told me this, but I could not believe it. If the furniture is sold, may anybody buy it, Mr. Philpin?'

'Certainly. It will be sold by public auction.'

The school-mistress trembled a little

with nervousness at the further prosecution of her scheme.

‘How much do you think the whole of it will come to?’ she said. ‘Will two—’ she hesitated, dreading his answer.

‘Very hard to say. I never had the honour to be under Mr. Bewglass’ roof, Miss Sulby, so I don’t know the nature of the furniture. From his general character I should not think he was extravagant at all in that respect.’

‘No. It is all plain, but strong and good. There is nothing expensive at all.’

‘Then I should think, for a country sale, it would hardly realise a hundred and fifty pounds.’

‘One hundred and fifty! You really think not, Mr. Philpin?’ cried Ruth, excitedly.

‘Certainly not more, if it is of the nature you describe.’

‘Then I can do it,’ was the still excited

rejoinder. 'Will you help me in what I want to do, Mr. Philpin?'

The gentleman's eyes showed rapture.

'O, my dear Miss Sulby, command me. Order me to the antipodes; order me to advance the money——'

'I have the money,' she said, opening a little bag she had with her. 'Here is two hundred pounds. I can let you have more.'

Mr. Philpin rose from his chair and put his hand upon his forehead. Ruth looked at him inquiringly.

'Are you disappointed?' she said, with a smile.

'Go on, Miss Sulby, go on.'

'I love Mrs. Bewglass very much,' Ruth accordingly proceeded, 'and I know what a terrible blow it will be to her to lose all the old things. They are like a part of her life. I want to buy the whole of the furniture for her when it is sold. But, Mr. Philpin, it will have to be done

secretly. She is so proud that she would not accept a farthing, not even from me. She would rather lose everything than keep them by borrowing; but I think, if we do it in the way I propose, we can manage it without offending her. I wish to leave this money with you, Mr. Philpin, and to ask if you will send somebody to the sale, whenever it is held, to buy everything there is. Of course, you will not mention a word about me to anybody.'

'Not for the world; not for the world,' said Mr. Philpin, who had again taken his seat, and was entering with juvenile delight into the scheme.

'But I have never told you about the money. It is the same that Mr. Wayfer left me.'

Ruth then proceeded to relate the history of the bank-notes, with which we are already acquainted. Mr. Philpin was unable to conceal his amazement; but the

topic was soon passed over for the one immediately in hand.

‘I need hardly say, Miss Sulby, that the enterprise will be in my hands a labour of love. It shall be carried out with the utmost secrecy and—and dispatch; that is, when the proper moment arrives. Your action is noble and beautiful, and such as I—I am hardly worthy to take part in.’

‘I am sure that is very far from the case,’ replied Ruth, without returning his gaze.

‘Do *you* think so, Miss Sulby? Then I am satisfied; I ask no more. I submit to your judgment. At least, it shall be my endeavour to approach in some very small degree to the very flattering character with which you have honoured me. That I should have lived to see this day!’

‘We can decide later how to proceed after the sale. I have not yet thought

sufficiently about it. The first thing is to make sure of saving the furniture. Mrs. Bewglass says that the sale may occur any day; do you think that is so, Mr. Philpin?’

‘Well, I hardly know at what stage the action lies. They will certainly not sell without advertising the sale, so that we shall get due notice of the proceedings. I will also see my friend Wilkins about it; he will keep me informed. Leave it in my hands, Miss Sulby, and you shall find me a faithful servant.’

‘Thank you, Mr. Philpin. It is very kind of you to say so.’

‘Kind of me! My dear young lady—’ he began, in a low, earnest tone, but altered it as Ruth started,—‘if you knew the delight I feel. Here—right here! Could you but see the working! You received the report?’

‘O, yes. But I always see the news-

paper, so that you need not trouble to send it, Mr. Philpin.'

The man's feelings were obviously hurt. He sighed.

'I thought there might be—perhaps a little—just a modicum of adventitious value in—in a presentation copy, my dear Miss Sulby, from the hand of the author.'

Ruth made no reply at first. She could not conceive why he should be so friendly towards her, and apparently so anxious also to obtain her good-will for himself. Seeing Mr. Philpin's disappointment, she remarked,

'I suppose you wrote the account, Mr. Philpin?'

'I hope I did not offend by the humble tribute to a young lady's distinguished merits. I feared to say more, although pining to do so.'

'If you refer to the remark about myself,' said Miss Sulby, laughing, 'I can say

that it is not true. I never went near the granary to help in the decoration ; I had not time. It was all Miss Silverside.'

'Of small moment,' observed Mr. Philpin. 'You understood the allusion?'

Ruth looked inquiringly.

'The bard?'

'I supposed that it referred to yourself ; but perhaps——'

'Certainly. They were the opening lines of the "Hymn of a Christian Socialist," not yet appeared. May I—to tell the truth, Miss Sulby, as you came up—the legal mind must be unbent—a few moments' recreation in the middle of the morning serves as a tonic for the rest of the day.'

Mr. Philpin had raised up the abstract of title from the table and drawn a foolscap slip from beneath it.

'May I read it, Miss Sulby? This is the fair copy for the press. I was just finishing it as you knocked, but not know-

ing—I deemed it wisest to—people will not understand, my dear young lady. Now my excellent principal, for instance : an essentially practical man, an admirable conveyancer, but no appreciation of art. Had I known it was you, my tactics would have been different. But it would spoil it,’ he continued, replacing the sheet of paper on the table. ‘Yes, it would spoil it. You shall see it in print. You keep your eye on the Poet’s Corner?’

‘I generally look at it.’

‘All signed “Adam,”’ he remarked, with a significant wink. ““Notes by the Way,” are also mine, but will be hardly so interesting to you. They must deal with the practical. This literary work is the solace of my life ; and the drudgery of an office requires some solace. O, if you could see my volumes ! If you would come round to my rooms !’

Ruth began to fear that all this was to be endless.

‘Not to-day, Mr. Philpin. I must really go now.’

‘Just a few moments, Miss Sulby. Such a glimpse of happiness is rare. I am a lonely widower, and have little congenial society. Do not deprive me so soon of the rays which your presence sheds around me. I have made a selection of a few of the principal of my verses, from spare cuttings which I have by me, and I meant to send them through the post. You will not refuse to accept them as a tribute of my regard.’

He turned round, as he spoke, to a drawer which was behind him, and produced therefrom a long legal envelope which showed signs of bulky contents. It was fastened down and addressed to Miss Sulby at Shipcombe. He placed it in her hands, with some additional expression of sentiment.

Ruth did not stay long after this. Some final reference was made to the business

upon which she had come, and arrangements definitely settled; and then Mr. Philpin was fain to let his client depart. He had not said a tithe of what he had meant to say, and felt that he had wasted the golden opportunity, when he came afterwards to review the conversation. Ruth left the town with a feeling of considerable satisfaction.

CHAPTER V.

THE LANDLORD.

‘THIS be a queer start o’ Master Michael’s,’ observed Stephen Oates, one morning to Philip Godson the shepherd, as they were pretending occupation in Wayfer’s stables preparatory to going afield ; ‘ an uncommon curious start.’

It was still quite dark outside, and the interior of the stable was only lighted by a dim dirty lantern hanging from a hook in the wall by the door. There was no sound of wind without, and within there was only that of the munching horses, with an occasional movement of a heavy hoof amongst the straw as one of the animals

transferred his body's weight from one hind leg to the other. One of the men leaned against the end post of a stall partition, facing the lantern, whilst the other sat upon an overturned box beneath it. Both were somewhat elderly men.

‘If my opinion were asked, Stephen, which it yent, I should say as ’twunt answer.’

‘But yer opinion beunt worth much, Philip. ’Tull answer well enough.’

Stephen Oates was one of the argumentative race of men who find the extreme difficulty in unreservedly assenting to any proposition whatsoever, not emanating from themselves. His master's action would answer because Philip Godson thought it would not. Had the shepherd's opinion been the contrary, then Oates would have condemned the scheme. Philip was a weak man, so that contradiction had no effect upon his temper.

‘You'll ’ev a reason, Stephen, I warr’nd

ye. I beunt shrewd in affairs o' commerce, so I may like be wrong.'

'Why shouldn't ur answer, mun? That be the question I 'ev to ask.'

'To be sure,' remarked Godson. 'It be a fair question an' all, that's certain. I didn't think why ur shouldn't answer, o' course. When I fust heard on it, I said as 'twunt do, for I thought it. But a man can't always tell 'e, Stephen, what makes them thoughts in the inside. That be a concern as 'ev always appeared miraculous to I.'

'A man must be an infirm creatur, Philip, to talk as ye do, to a certainty. I could tell as 'e were one o' the hillard men if I were as blind as a 'oont. What a tract o' desolation 't must be, to be sure, up yonder! Us has some unkid villages hereabouts, up Winchcombe way however, but the population beunt such curious specimens as ye up the hills. There were always more learning in the vale; my father

always said that, my granfer as well, in fact. I should think as I were out of the world altogether if I had to bide up there. Ye may be glad as ye've got amongst Gristin folk; but ye be over old to make much advancement at the learning, o' course.'

'But I often wish as I were back again, Stephen. It beunt such a comfortless country as ye'd imagine. There be some men o' learning up there an' all, I can tell 'e.'

'So it may appear to one o' your abilities, Philip; but I 'ev always heard as the hillard folk be but a poor sample at the best on 'em, and from they as I 'ev met it do seem like to be uncommon true. Stand still wi' yer, Durgan!' he exclaimed, parenthetically to a horse that was striking his hoof upon the cobbles of the floor. 'But ye 'ev led me astray, Philip, wi' your maundering. Why shouldn't this start o' the master's answer? were my question, and

seemingly ye can't give me no reason.'

Wayfer's schemes had by now in some measure become public property, and they were eagerly discussed accordingly by all classes of his neighbours. He had insisted to Clinkscles upon the utmost secrecy with regard to the actual details of his undertaking until they were in complete readiness for a practical commencement; but in such a small community of course it was impossible to hide the fact of his having taken the tenancy of that shop in the High Street for one thing, and the necessary alterations which were going on amongst his farm stock were obvious to all.

Conclusions, therefore, had been come to by all shrewd observers, and amongst the number was to be considered Stephen Oates, a carter in Wayfer's own employment. His theory of the changes, based not only upon his own observations but also upon reports of chance conversations which had passed between his master and

Philip Godson the shepherd, and disclosed to Stephen by one of the parties to it at first hand,—Oates' theory of the alterations, I say, had been propounded to and accepted by his fellow-labourers as the only accurate one. Not many cared, or troubled, to gainsay any statement which Stephen authoritatively announced.

‘Noa, I can’t give ’e no answer, Stephen Oates ; I beunt no hand at it as I ’ev telled ye already.’

‘Well, it be my belief as ’tull make money, reason or no reason. It beunt necessary to talk about partic’lars to you, Philip, for ye oodn’t understand ’em. ’T be enough to say as it ’ull make money because Michael Wayfer ’ev it in his hand. Ye never knawed a Wayfer as weren’t a good hand i’ that direction : ’cepting, o’ course, Ephraim Riley ; ur be a perishable specimen, but then ur yent a Wayfer in urself. Eeh ! how the old master did nag Susannah,—that were his daughter,—when

her married Ephraim Riley. Ur had store of viltry speech had old Jonathan Wayfer, when ur'd like to use it, and ur did when them two married, I can tell 'e, Philip. Ur becalled 'em sky-high, that ur did. There have been a continual difference a-tween 'em ever since. Master Michael 'ev kep it up desperd. They said as Riley comed at last to make it up wi' the old man, when ur lay on his last bed, but Master Michael raised his hand against un and oodn't let un come anighst the house. That were an unlikely tale, however, for Ephraim beunt much at religion, never were.'

'But ur med ha' comed for all that, Stephen? 'S like ur had a mind on the money.'

'Eess, o' course, that be a item an' all,' said Oates, in a tone of suppressed approbation, unwilling to encourage too far any original remark in his companion. 'But 'em tell me as the daughters didn't get much o' the money, and 'tweren't like as

'em should. Riley 'ud ha' been glad o' some o' that, for ur be getting on very middlin' by appearance. I heard a report, in fact, as the bums were a-coming in, but whether that be true I can't say.'

'It oodn't cause I a deal of 'onderment if 'em were,' said the shepherd.

'Noa, it ull come to that at the last. But the queerest start of all be Riley thinking as ur can become parish clerk. It do seem certain as old Jabez Coldicott be a-going to die; but, bless me, Ephraim Riley beunt no more of a scholar than 'e be yourself, Philip. The parish clerk must be a scholar, o' course; o' some degree, however. 'T be my belief as some young man ull get it, and I beunt often in the wrong. This parson dunt seem to favour the older generation. Ur be different from Parson Bewglass in that respect, and in many others, in fact.'

'I ha'nt seen this new man but once; but the master telled I last night as ur

were a-coming up here to-day to see about these new buildings as the master be a-wanting.'

'What! The parson be a-coming up here?'

'Eess, I 'ev to be with 'em an' all.'

'Why, Philip Godson, what a close silent man 'e bist! Ye never telled——'

Oates stopped short then, and turned in beside one of the horses; he proceeded to grope about the manger assiduously.

'What be the matter, Stephen——' the shepherd began; but a figure stepping through the doorway stopped him also.

'Now, Oates, be getting down to them turnips,' said a voice of authority. 'It's quite light enough for that job. Philip, come along with me.'

The shepherd arose with comparative alacrity from his seat upon the box, and followed his master into the dusky atmosphere outside. They went along to the cow-house, where they engaged in a long

conversation as to the required improvements. From there they made a perambulation of the whole buildings,—dairy, pigsties, stables, and the rest,—discussing fully the defects of each, by no means for the first time. Notwithstanding the disparaging opinion of his fellow-servant held by Stephen Oates, the shepherd seemed to stand well with his master. Michael Wayfer interrogated Philip freely, and apparently paid close attention to his suggestions upon all points. The old man showed an extensive practical knowledge of the matters in hand, and, although he announced his judgments with a tantalizing degree of deliberation, they were always found to have been worth the waiting for. The attitude of the young farmer proved this, for as a rule he was disposed to show but a small amount of patience towards the measured remarks of his rustics.

Philip Godson, however, never gave a

reason for any one of his suggestions. They seemed to be the outcome of mere instinct, or of an unconscious experience which had all the appearance of instinct. That it was this latter seemed to be proved by his giving, upon some rare occasion, an example in support of his bare statement. Master —— of ——, or Master —— of —— had it so. Wayfer was quite capable of extracting the principle from the bare statement of a fact.

They had been fully two hours engaged in this way when Wayfer heard the farm-yard gate slammed and the sound of a horse's footstep coming forward on the stones. Some fowls ran screaming out of the way, and the two dogs ran out barking.

‘Here he is,’ remarked Wayfer to his attendant, and walked out into the yard.

‘Good-morning, Mr. Wayfer,’ said the gentleman on horseback, raising his riding-whip by way of salute.

‘Good-morning, sir,’ was the young

man's reply as he raised his hat and walked towards the horse's head. 'Let me take the horse, sir.'

The gentleman leaped lightly from the saddle as he passed some remark about the weather.

This visitor was obviously a clergyman, and to an unprejudiced observer would have offered a prepossessing appearance. Presumably he would be between forty and fifty years of age, but, save for the suspicion of grey which tinged his hair and beard, he might well have passed for five-and-thirty. He looked in every respect a gentleman, alike in garb, bearing, and features. His face was plump and fresh-coloured, being now pleasantly aglow after his ride through the cold morning air. He wore a clerical hat, well back on his forehead, and a most scrupulously fitting black jacket of substantial woolly material; a tasteful gold watch-chain and seals were prominent against

the black background of his waistcoat. Buff riding gloves shielded his hands, and he wore the darkest brown leggings below the knees. As he looked about the premises, whilst Wayfer was disposing of his horse, the gentleman's face bore a most amiable aspect, and he seemed in search of somebody or thing upon which he could bestow some of his good nature. The shepherd was near at hand and towards him the clergyman stepped. At that moment Philip's face looked remarkably stolid, as he met unflinchingly the gaze of the visitor.

This, then, was the unknown vicar, by name the Reverend Alan Silverside, who was so variously discussed by his parishioners. Had the shepherd been capable of instantaneous reflection he would have mentally pronounced his opinion that 'Mr. Silverside seemed a very tidy man.' As a matter of fact his opinion was not formulated until later in the morning. At

present all his faculties were concentrated in his eyes.

‘Nice open weather, my man,’ remarked the vicar. ‘What place do you hold on the farm?’

‘Philip Godson the shepherd, sir, if you please.’

‘And a good one too, sir,’ interposed Wayfer, who came forward at the moment. ‘He is worth all the other men put together.’

‘I should think so,’ was the clergyman’s reply. ‘I have no doubt an excellent man. Now, Mr. Wayfer, I hope you don’t mean to keep me long. I can just see what are your proposals, and take them into consideration.’

This seemed an unpropitious opening to one of Michael Wayfer’s ardent disposition; he foresaw at once all kinds of delay and irritation. However, he had sufficient command over himself to set about the business with a good grace, in which

the clergyman very readily met him.

It would be tedious to follow them in detail in their survey of the farm buildings, as indeed at certain moments it appeared to be to the clerical landlord himself. This gentleman made but few remarks whilst the survey lasted: he nodded as Wayfer required this cowhouse to be enlarged so as to accommodate so many; this pigsty to be rebuilt; this stable re-roofed, or what not; stealing a smile perhaps as he passed out of one dusky quarter into another, and striking his calf with the butt-end of his riding whip as he made any especially discouraging remark.

At length they stood again in the farmyard for the final consultation, Mr. Silver-side and Wayfer alone. The latter was scarce able to hide his disappointment, if not actual dissatisfaction, at the interview.

‘ You suggest extensive alterations, Mr. Wayfer; but we will see what is possible. That very much wants doing to your

buildings is obvious enough, but my solicitor tells me that it is doubtful how much of the dilapidation claim will be realized : most likely not all of it. I shall be very anxious, with the surveyor's sanction, to lay out what money we have in a manner most calculated to meet your wants ; but of course you understand that in respect of this property I am not in the position of a freehold landlord.'

'I only ask for the necessary alterations, sir, which will help me to make my rent.'

'No doubt. I am only anxious to let you know my position clearly, so that you may not raise your expectations too high. Personally, I think your schemes admirable, and I should be only too glad to give you all assistance in your enterprise. Unfortunately in this case my power is limited ; but you may depend upon my doing what I can. What, is that Mr. Kimble over there?' exclaimed the clergyman, looking towards the field outside the farm-yard.

‘Yes; he seems to be waiting to see you. Can we do any more now, do you think?’

‘That is all I had to talk about just now, sir. I know that it is impossible for me to work the farm with these present buildings.’

‘Yes, of course, something must be done, and shall be done. We must get an estimate from some architect, in the first place, and then we can compare it with the funds at our disposal.’

‘When can this be done, sir? I hope it won’t be put off.’

‘Not a day longer than is necessary. Directly the affairs are settled we can decide more definitely. There may be some little delay; but I really don’t know how things stand. Good-morning, Mr. Kimble,’ shouted the vicar to that gentleman, who was fully fifty yards away, but happened to be looking in their direction. ‘We shan’t keep you much longer. I had better

not hinder you further, Mr. Wayfer. If you will be kind enough to let Grandson get my horse ;—a singular name that, by-the-by. Is he a native of this part ?’

‘Godson, sir, is the name. He comes from up the hills, Stow way. But I’ll get your horse, sir.’

‘Godson ; equally singular. O, thank you, thank you. I hope we shall be able to do what you wish, Mr. Wayfer. Now, Mr. Kimble, waiting your turn,’ continued Mr. Silverside, holding out his hand to the new-comer.

The clergyman then mounted his horse, and, raising his whip again by way of salute, he bade them good-morning. He trotted away to join the hounds.

Wayfer did not take the trouble to hide his scowl when there was only Mr. Kimble present to observe it. It was quite likely that this latter gentleman was more than half the cause of that display of ill-humour, for of late there was but little friendship

lost between these two neighbours. Wayfer seemed fully prepared to resent this undesired visit now, and he quickly forgot any feeling of dissatisfaction he may have had a minute or two before against his vicar.

‘Now, Wayfer,’ Mr. Kimble began, in that blunt resolute tone which seemed most natural to him, ‘I have come again about this dilapidation money. Will ’e pay it or no?’

‘I told you before I’m not going to pay it. I know nothing about it.’

‘You know better than that. I hear this morning that they’ve got judgment for it, and that very soon they’ll be coming to sell up Mrs. Bewglass’ bit of furniture. Do you mean to say that you’ll see that, when you know that you owe the money?’

‘I don’t owe the money. If I do, you know how to make me pay it. I am not going to pay money for a word spoken by a man when he’s out of his mind. If he’d

had the money there would ha' been papers to show it. If you have them you can sue me for the money.'

'Well, man, I didn't know before that you were a scoundrel, but I have good evidence of it now. Do you mean to say that this is your final answer?'

'Yes, I do. If the money is legally due from me you can get it; and if it isn't I'm not going to pay it.'

'You're going to let this poor woman be sold up, then, for money you owe to her; and when it was her husband who put you into the position you are in. You can say yes to this?'

'I have nothing more to say;'—and Wayfer turned away from the colloquy.

Mr. Kimble gave the man one look, and his right fist became involuntarily clenched; but he spoke no word. He turned his back upon the place angrily, and nearly broke the gate as he slammed it to upon his exit.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ADVERTISEMENT.

WAYFER continued to be absorbed in his enterprising schemes during the winterly days that followed. There were animated consultations between him and his henchman Clinkscapes, under which the latter acquired quite a renewed stock of vitality, and things seemed to proceed to the complete satisfaction of both of them. Mrs. Clinkscapes had been so far won over that she agreed to enter tentatively into the arrangement, so that one very great difficulty had been removed. Unless some unforeseen casualty should overtake them, the 'Cotswold Farm Stores' (which title

had been finally adopted) would open their doors to the public at No. 69, High Street, Dormantley, with the new year. The first advertisements had appeared in the *Mirror*, and a special paragraph, solicited from Mr. Philpin, had drawn attention to the commendable local enterprise.

Before these engagements, Wayfer's private undertakings had to bow. It was true that he went more frequently to see Joice Radway, and he was not silent whilst with her; but his talk turned almost exclusively upon poultry and dairies. Whether Joice received it with entire satisfaction there was little outward evidence to show. Never a word of complaint escaped her. She had such unbounded joy in her prospect that a mere rebuff or two to her sentiments could only cause at the most momentary depression of spirits. She entered with delight into his schemes, so far as they could in any way affect her, and she bid fair to realise

his most sanguine hopes. She visited any dairy to which she could gain access, so as to add to her practical qualifications, and had even bought herself a book upon the subject. If Wayfer patted her back with approval, or gave her one word of commendation, she was well repaid for her trouble. Their marriage had been definitely fixed for the twenty-fourth of December: a day in the very month that had now opened.

These doings of Wayfer, however, were not the only movements of importance which were engaging the attention of Shipcombe. For the moment, indeed, they had fallen altogether into the background, being eclipsed by a more imposing occurrence, which had for its centre the peaceful abode known as Rose Cottage. For some days Mr. Kimble had been especially active in its vicinity, and last Saturday morning had brought an explanation of his action. About nine

o'clock a.m. of that day a man stopped for a short time by its gateway, but he had not gone into the house. He bore in one hand a can and in the other a brush with a very long handle; round his shoulders he carried a bulky canvas bag. His intention very soon became obvious, and a cluster of children gathered round him. A figure with something white about the head, which at the moment had been standing at the window of the cottage, disappeared after ascertaining the purpose of the mysterious visitors; the man, too, soon passed onwards up the village, stopping here and there as he went.

It was but a few moments after that Mr. Kimble approached the gateway, and regarded the bill which had been pasted upon it: he passed on quickly to the door and walked in. Mrs. Bewglass opened the door for him into her parlour.

‘Won’t you come up?’ he asked the lady rather abruptly as he entered.

‘Thank you, Mr. Kimble; but I think I had better go and stay with Ruth for the present. You will not misunderstand me, I know. I can be more alone there, and I am sure I am good company for nobody just now.’

‘You mustn’t get downhearted about it,’ said he, trying to undertake a part which ill-fitted him. ‘I am sure it would have been better to tell Gabriel, for you might have been safely out of the way before this. Can I do anything for you, Mrs. Bewglass? Do tell me if I can.’

‘Nothing more, Mr. Kimble. I am sure you have done everything that kindness could do. I shall write to Gabriel when it is all over, and then we can decide upon our plans.’

‘When do you go up to the school? Don’t stay here long.’

‘Ruth is coming down this morning, and then I can finish. We shall leave here after dinner.’

The next few days Mrs. Bewglass passed at the school-house, preferring the quietude and loneliness of that place to any of the other friendly asylums which had been offered to her. The sale was advertised for the following Friday, so that until after that day she would be a self-constituted prisoner within those narrow walls. Throughout the day she kept herself actively employed, especially during the hours when Miss Sulby was occupied with her scholars, and when there was all the more temptation for the lady to give way to her trouble. The elements seemed to share her gloom, for the clear frosty days with which December had opened had given way to a thick saturating mist from the south-east, which scarcely lifted day or night. On the morning of the sale it cleared and a north wind drove it from the hills.

What was merely an uncomfortable evening of drizzling mist in the country, wrapping the silent village of Shipcombe,

and the more silent hill-slope above, in a coat of impenetrable darkness, became in the neighbourhood of Westminster an atmospheric complication of a very distressing description. That saturating mist on the hill-side was resistible by any ordinary means of exclusion, but this fog, which sat brooding on the Thames, defied all opposition.

Many, however, were making the attempt, and amongst the number was our former acquaintance, Mr. Gabriel Bewglass. Amongst the throng hurrying across that endless bridge, visible only as dark spectres when they passed through those dim patches of orange lamplight, was his stalwart, irrecoznizable figure, shrouded from ears to heel in an expanse of dusky cloth. He strode along more quickly than most, and frequently stepped from the causeway into the road to pass some impediment in his path. Presently he launched upon the interminable Kenning-

ton Road, and, after a long, weary trudge, took final refuge in a narrow by-street.

An indifferent refuge he found it. The fog clung about him and about the room in which he had taken shelter, causing grievous irritation to his eyes and throat, and in imagination he could still feel the slimy pavement under-foot. Those bleared gas-lamps and steamed shop window panes could not be escaped even now that his doors were shut against them. They stared at him with unusual grimness to-night, giving eyes to a dull sense of oppression which had burdened him throughout the day, and which no strenuous effort of his had been able to cast off. It was a long time since he had been so persecuted by these humours, and he had flattered himself that he had outgrown them.

That walk hither he did not find, under any conditions, inspiriting: the way was cheerless to him, and the bourne to which it led even more so. Doubtless he might

have found a haven, in all these comfortless leagues of bricks, which would have offered a better apology for comfort than this particular one ; but for some reason of his own Bewglass had withdrawn hither at the time of his father's death, and had philosophically endured the various forms of torture appertaining to it ever since.

Gabriel lit his lamp and put a match to the fire, then threw himself listlessly into an arm-chair. Even here the lamplight was hazy, and the cold air was redolent of the outside fog, which lost none of its noxious qualities by the process of filtration through windows, doors, and chimney. Fortunately it was night, so that he was at least spared that blank outlook from his area window. The sky, as viewed through those mud-bespattered top panes, with railings and other media behind, he could never find exhilarating ; least of all would he have found it so in this particular state of the atmosphere. He therefore fixed his

eyes upon the cold grate before him. It was a questionable improvement in the prospect, (had Bewglass at the moment been fully conscious of what he was regarding,) for the fire material was showing very little inclination to light. The tightly screwed-up newspaper was slowly smouldering away, fully convinced of its inability to prevail against the modicum of damp wood and dross which bore down upon it. Presently the coal-dust sank and ran, as through a riddle, into the ash-pan. This seemed to arouse the onlooker, and he jumped up quickly from his chair. He thrust more paper between the bars, and for the next twenty minutes he was upon his knees holding an open newspaper before the flue.

This was by no means the first time that Gabriel had experienced the uneasiness of this position. First his palms, then his elbows, finally the whole cubit would be used to support the paper ; but still the

circulation was irregular and his arms ached. Just as he found it impossible to continue longer, an incipient flame would arise and delude him into continued effort. It was after one such delusion, when his head had been pressed forward on one arm, that his eye fell upon the print of the paper he was holding. It was the *Dormantley Mirror* for last week, and it at once aroused associated thoughts. He remembered that it was not addressed to him in his mother's hand as usual, but in a writing unknown. He had had a vague impression that it would be Mr. Kimble's, but he had attached no significance to it. It only raised a tantalising picture of the Shipcombe farmer sitting by that cosy cottage hearth, in consultation with his mother. Gabriel knew her ways; doubtless she had asked him to address it in order to save herself the trouble. The young man had thrown the paper aside upon its arrival, for of late weeks its only

use to him had been the use to which he was now putting it.

As these thoughts grew in his mind he scanned the columns of the paper. It was the advertisement sheet which was before him, upon which appeared many names in large type. Presently his eye was arrested and he looked more intently with a purpose. Had his eye deceived him? He was aware that it often did so under such conditions. He had that moment received a curious impression that the name of Bewglass was printed somewhere upon the paper. Everybody is familiar with this particular form of impression. It need not be our own name that has struck us; but generally one of equal familiarity. Sometimes it is a first syllable that has deceived the eye; sometimes it is a last; sometimes it proves to be the whole word as we had thought it; not impossibly one's own surname in strange connection.

Gabriel was not long in tracing out the

word of which he was in search, and he rose from his knees when he had done so. His efforts with the fire were abandoned, and it was allowed to die out unmolested. He sat again in the arm-chair.

For a long time he stared vacantly at the paper. His landlady had laid his non-descript meal ; but, hungry as he had been only a few moments before, he paid no attention to the table. That newspaper seemed to suffice for all. Let us see what announcement it was which so interested him. That must be it, undoubtedly. The name of Bewglass is there in capitals, in the column headed ‘Sales by Auction.’ It ran thus :

ROSE COTTAGE, SHIPCOMBE.

re REV. DAVID BEWGLASS, deceased.


Ecclesiastical Dilapidations. Under a judgment of the Court.

J. G. WHITEHEAD

has received instructions to SELL BY AUCTION, as above, on Friday, the —th day of December, 18—, the whole of the SUPERIOR HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE and effects, the property of the late Rev. D. Bewglass, deceased, including Bed-room suites, Bedsteads, Bedding and Mattresses, Dining-room suite,

[Here followed a misrepresentative list of Gabriel's household gods, which made him tremble in the reading.]

Together with 300 volumes of Books.

 The whole of the above Furniture is in a remarkably good condition, and the Books are all standard works well bound.

Sale at half-past ten o'clock.

Catalogues may be had at the Office of the Auctioneer, Dormantley, or at the Harrow Inn, Shipcombe.

When the first stunning effect of this discovery had been overcome, Gabriel tried to view collectedly the situation. In the first place, what was he himself to do? Why on earth had he not been informed during the progress of things? This latter question was speedily answered, for he knew well his mother's nature. What was she doing? Bewglass was not a sentimental man; but, when his sensibility did receive a blow, doubtless it was of a more serious nature than it might have been to one of a more impressionable disposition.

He looked again at the date, Friday,—

December, to-day was, if he mistook not, Thursday the —, and now but little more than two hours from the opening of that next fatal day. In thirteen hours the destruction would commence; nay, had already long since commenced, for he knew what preparation was necessary for a sale by auction. He walked for some time about the room.

Shipcombe was a place difficult of access, and, study Bradshaw as he would, Bewglass was unable to devise any method by which he could reach the village before the sale commenced. Telegraph, he could, —in the morning at any rate;—but to what end? He could not commission the auctioneer to buy in all the goods, for Gabriel himself possessed exactly forty-two pounds: a sum, he knew, wholly inadequate to the purchase of one half of the furniture. No, he must go even if he got there too late to rescue much. He knew that a sale never began to time;—a piece of unpunc-

tuality which was in his favour on this occasion ;—but what to do when he got there he left for circumstances to determine.

He could lay no plans to-night ; his mind was in a far too perturbed state for that. He did not even pretend to go to bed. Whilst the woman was engaged with the fire, Bewglass packed a small hand-bag full of things, and then came down again to his sitting-room, with the intention of passing the night there. He could not get away before half-past six the next morning, when a slow train would take him three parts of his journey, at which stage he would have to while away an odd hour and a half before another train came to take him to Dormantley. From there he would still have upwards of an hour's drive to Shipcombe.

These thoughts irritated him throughout the night, preventing him from burying himself in a book or in any other form of employment which might have helped the

hours to pass. The great sullen bell from the Victoria Tower which came booming through the fog at such enormous intervals seemed to this listener the very passing bell of time, so deliberate were the strokes. The twelve strokes of midnight he thought would never cease. Then one and two and three ; he could endure it no longer.

The last stroke of three had but just died away when Gabriel stepped again into the fog-bound street. The atmosphere was perhaps somewhat less dense than in the early hours of the night ; but, even yet, two consecutive lamp-posts were not distinguishable. The slimy pavements were now coated with frost, but were thus even less dangerous than in their former state of moisture. Such were the conditions under which Bewglass proposed to spend the ensuing three hours and a half.

It was a long walk to Paddington, most directly taken, but not long enough to fill up the time which was at his disposal. He

must make a circuit in order to do that, and upon a rambling journey he accordingly started. It would hardly seem a preferable employment to sitting unoccupied in that cheerless room which he had left. Probably he found it so. Street after street he traversed, flitting like some midnight criminal from point to point. More than once he was accosted by the police, in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross station and again beside the British Museum. At last he was sauntering along Marylebone Road in the direction of the Great Western Railway terminus. He began to encounter people abroad, which gave some little aspect of hopefulness. A church clock clanged out the quarters twice. The young man stood beneath a lamp-post to examine his watch. It was half-past five.

A dismal railway journey it was, so far as his first place of change. He had no food at all till he got there, but during the

hour and twenty minutes of his imprisonment, he fully made up for the fast. When he was once again in the train, he felt more braced up for his undertaking. Difficulties no longer assumed that utterly hopeless aspect, which they had done in the foggy hours. The man had a good fund of vitality within him, and it was thoroughly stirred up by the sights of the country. Natives got into his compartment and discussed bullocks in a racy vernacular. Bew-glass could not have been offered a more stimulating tonic. He entered at once into their talk, and the time passed lightly until the end of the journey.

It was after eleven o'clock when he alighted at Dormantley station, and the mere thought of time revived some of his gloomy humours. He was glad not to encounter anybody he knew on his way to the inn-yard. There he was not long in obtaining a gig, and in little over an hour's time he was driving into his native village.

CHAPTER VII.

DILAPIDATIONS.

THE auctioneer's hammer resounded in that dismantled cottage. What had a few weeks ago been a scene of simple domestic peace, an infinitesimal fraction of all this dreary space, closed in and sanctified to the pious uses of a home, had now again become a portion of primeval chaos. That hearth whence had emanated warmth and consolation, for no selfish inmates alone, but for the woes and perplexities of a whole community, was now deserted and cold: the last handful of embers had died out; the vestal priestess fled: this heap of grey lifeless ashes alone remained as a

mockery of the departed glow. The winds played mournfully amongst them on the stone, whirling and scattering them in all directions, and crooning a melancholy dirge. They at least moved there with a sympathetic sound, for they were the winds of heaven. Other blasts of the earth were there, which offered but little suggestion of sympathy. Cold as was that bitterest breath of December, it seemed warm to the loveless breath of man which whistled throughout the ruins. The former only blew from the region of the arctic circle, and could not but heave disconsolate sighs over this insignificant fragment of recovered territory : the latter owned a far more frigid zone, blowing from the illimitable ice-bound fields of human curiosity, to which no sighs are known and to which no nook is sacred.

Those sacred barriers were shattered, and vulgar hordes ruthlessly trampled the precincts, desecrating the holy vessels

with sacrilegious eyes and hands. Even those who had felt the warmth of that fire in its brightest days were not deterred by its lifeless heap of ashes. Here and there they pried, criticizing material quality and degree of wear. Every article obtruded itself in baldest individuality: no longer blended into one perfect work of art in which none of the constituent details assumed to itself an undue prominence over the whole. Walls and floors were bare; windows were without blinds or curtains. A roll of carpet here by the side of some tied-up fire-irons; heaps of glass and china lying orderly upon that bare mahogany table; chairs turned up in pairs and relegated to the corners: all to be handled by every comer, and a maximum price to be affixed.

‘What bist after, Sarah?’ said one woman to a friend whom she found rummaging the kitchen.

‘I want a pair o’ belluses,’ replied Sarah,

in strictest confidence. 'Tommy 'ev ripped mine up. 'St seen such a thing about anywhere?'

'Eess, there be a pair somewhere; but 'em beunt worth nothing. I 'udn't go the vallie o' twopence for the like o' they. 'Sides, 'em go wi' a dutch oven and a pair o' flat irons. I'd ha' done wi' the oven myself, but Betsy Lucas be a-wanting the irons, and her wunt mind what her bid. Things be a-going awful dear.'

'And 'em be so uncommon old,' interposed another woman standing near, who had never had a thought of being a purchaser. 'I never see'd such a poor lot o' stuff, and I 'ev see'd a-many sales i' my time.'

''Em have had a deal o' wear, Mrs. Creed, for 'em weren't bought yesterday. But if the belluses beunt worth buying, I shan't daudle here no longer, for it be so dismal cold that I can't say as whether I han't caught the inflammation a'ready. They

med ha' put a bit o' fire for us, bin as it's winter time. Good morning, Mrs. Creed.'

At that moment roars of laughter issued from the front room where the sale was just then proceeding, and all stragglers were drawn thither to share in the fun.

'Now, then, how much for the baby chair?' cried the auctioneer again, holding up an infant's broken rocking-chair. 'We're giving things away to-day. It isn't new, but there's a generation of wear in it yet. Now, who's setting up house? Haven't you brought him up to it yet, Polly?' he said to a young woman standing near, who slunk behind a neighbour at the volley of laughter which ensued. 'Come, sixpence? Thank you, sir. Sixpence—any advance?'

The auctioneer, who was sitting on the table, was a broad man with a fat, red face and wearing a chimney-pot hat thrust to the back of his head, so as to offer to the assembly his unclouded countenance.

‘A shilling,—one and six,—two shillings, thank you. Going at two shillings,—is there no advance on two shillings? Going, going,—no advance?’ Down goes the little white hammer. ‘Yours, Mr. Philpin.’

Then another article was seized from the table and presented to the assembly with all the facetious rhetoric of the sale-room. Mr. Whitehead was a great favourite with auction haunters, and was rich in the particular quality of humour which such an assembly demands. Village audiences are not generally credited with the keenest perception of humour, but they can appreciate the particular kind which appeals to them as deeply as the readers of Mr. Punch and Ally Sloper can appreciate theirs. One man’s meat is another man’s poison, even in the common appetite for what we call fun.

Whilst this boisterous mirth was proceeding, a man joined the assembly who did not display much appreciation of the

sport. He was a young man, tall and strongly made, with a resolute countenance. As he stepped into the room, much of the laughter ceased and people whispered together. Bewglass went up to the auctioneer and exchanged a few words with him in a tone inaudible to the general company ; he was apparently referred to Mr. Philpin, who was conspicuous amongst the throng owing to his dignified appearance, and this gentleman and Gabriel left the room together. In a few moments Mr. Philpin returned alone, and the sale was proceeded with as before.

Bewglass had, in those few moments, received information which astounded him. It sounded too much like some pleasant delusion in which a man might momentarily indulge in a particularly vacuous mood ; it savoured but little of reality to one of a slightly cynical tendency. A conversation with his friend Kimble would, however, reduce it to its practical standing,

if anything in the world would, so that Gabriel turned his steps toward the farm at the head of the village.

He had several fields to traverse before he met with the object of his search : when the farmer was encountered he proved to be in anything but a favourable mood. He had been storming at some 'pig-headed fool of a labourer,' as Mr. Kimble himself termed him, and for some moments the clouds continued in the zenith. The presence of Bewglass, in fact, stirred up the thunder afresh, for he was suggestive of further pig-headedness or worse. Nobody in the parish had been more strongly attached to the dead vicar than his old friend, churchwarden, and executor, Mr. John Kimble ; and nobody felt more sympathy for the distresses of the unfortunate widow. Nevertheless, these feelings were not inconsistent with wrath. It was a hard enough case, he knew ; but on the sly he fumed against the unbusinesslike

doings of parsons, who, after the receipt of an adequate income for about forty years, could leave his family to go to the work-house.

Philanthropy and benevolence were all very well in their way, but in Mr. Kimble's mind they fell little short of criminal excesses when they violated the sound practice of economics. Solvency and worldly prudence must be the groundwork of any gospel that he would preach. Ravens, he said, might perhaps have fed people in former times, but they did not do it in this country. If you did not build on a sound financial basis, quite irrespective of ravens and other similarly uncertain sources, you must expect to go to the wall. The life of David Bewglass was a flagrant case in point : and the sight of Gabriel, his son, stirred up all these feelings within the farmer's heart.

‘ O, you’ve come at last, have you ?
What’s the good o’ coming now ?’

‘Better late than never,’ was Gabriel’s light reply.

‘Didn’t you get the paper?’

‘Yes, but I never opened it until last night. I have——’

‘Just like you, too. You’ll get to the workhouse yet. The whole pack of you are the same.’

Gabriel’s attitude fed the fire: had he shown the slightest symptom of depression the irate farmer would have been subdued at once. The fact is Bewglass enjoyed his friend in this mood, and never made an effort to appease him; his efforts were rather in the other direction.

‘Well, what are you going to do now? Any sane suggestion seems useless.’

‘Utterly,’ was the reply. ‘I have hit upon something insane.’

‘You didn’t go far for that,’ retorted the farmer, with just a suspicion of a thaw.

‘Not very far, certainly. But come, I want to have a talk. Why wasn’t I informed of this?’

‘I was threatened with death if I informed you; you mustn’t know until after: you might cut your own throat or somebody else’s if you had a suspicion of the thing. I risked my life by sending the paper.’

‘Did Wayfer refuse to repay the money?’

‘Wayfer is a damned scoundrel, and we need waste no more words upon him.’

‘But you don’t mean to say, Mr. Kimble, that he has not paid it.’

‘He has not only not paid it, but the worst of all is we can’t make him. He repudiates the claim altogether on the plea that his father was incapable, and we have nothing by which we can sustain it. That at least is what the lawyers say, and we have no money to fight it with.’

‘That is Mr. Michael, is it?’ said Gabriel, half to himself. ‘I should never have had the suspicion.’

‘It is always the way with these men of straw. If he had been ploughing another man’s land, which is the position for which he was born, he would have been honest to the end of his days. When a man gets out of his position, he is certain to become a scoundrel.’

‘It seems like it in this case, certainly. But don’t trouble about that. Somebody is buying in the furniture for us, so that we can leave Mr. Wayfer with his conscience.’

‘Buying in the furniture! What the deuce are you talking about, Gabriel?’

The young man proceeded to explain by divulging Mr. Philpin’s communication. He had expected an explanation from Mr. Kimble, but, from the undisguised amazement of that gentleman, this was obviously the first that he had heard of it. Gabriel knew that he could never act it.

‘Doesn’t my mother, then, know anything about it?’ asked the young man.

‘Not unless she has learned it within the last hour.’

‘Then I will go and see her presently. Mr. Kimble, who is the parish clerk? They tell me that Coldicott is dead.’

‘I don’t know. I am pestered by dozens of the folks,’ replied the churchwarden, with irritation.

‘It is not promised, then?’

‘No.’

‘Then promise it me forthwith. I am a candidate for the office.’

Mr. Kimble eyed his companion.

‘I am not joking, I assure you. I am determined to have the office, and you cannot refuse me your support.’

A long argument ensued as the two crossed over the fields. The applicant’s earnestness was undoubted, as was also the amazement of Mr. Kimble. The latter began to think that insanity must really

be in the family, often as he had jested about it. Could sane man behave in this manner?

Whatever were the churchwarden's thoughts, Gabriel's stubbornness subdued him. The latter urged no philosophical motives for his conduct, but used the arguments most likely to avail him with a man of Mr. Kimble's nature. When he had exacted a promise of support, which his friend was unable to withhold, Bewglass was anxious to be off. He made a few inquiries relative to his mother, and the attitude she assumed towards her troubles, then departed in the direction of the village to find her.

Mr. Kimble stood for some time regarding him, until at last a hedge put him out of sight. The farmer then rode away upon business of his own.

CHAPTER VIII.

A L T E R N A T I V E S .

It was not without a tremor that Gabriel Bewglass stepped through that school-yard gateway. He could well imagine his mother patient and self-sustaining,—could not, in fact, easily imagine her otherwise,—and he had Mr. Kimble's direct testimony to that effect; nevertheless, the approaching interview would be a trying one: quite as much so for the young man himself as for the widowed mother he loved so well.

All the earth was drenched with the mist and drizzle of the previous days; but above was a bright blue sky, flecked with

fleecy cloudlets, which sailed slowly from the north-east before a piercing wind. The hills and the vale were hazy in the sunlight. Under other circumstances, Bewglass would have shouted, in such an atmosphere, the refrain of a Border song or ballad: at present he was mute.

The gate was thrown open, for the scholars were at work, as their voices were at that moment testifying. The small square yard formed a quadrangle, having the mistress's residence on the right hand, the school-house on the left, a high wall at the extremity, and these railings in the front. Owing to the sound of the children's voices, it was to the school that Gabriel first looked. As he did so, a figure appeared at the window, and gazed through the diamond panes: in a second it was gone. The visitor turned towards the right-hand door. He had not seen that other figure, with the white head-dress and pale features, which had disappeared

from this window at the same instant as the one opposite had done. Without ceremony he entered the house, and closed the door behind him.

Mrs. Bewglass was riveted to the hearth-rug when her son appeared before her. Her eyes were fixed upon him, with the slightest suspicion of fright traceable in their expression; she exclaimed the one word 'Gabriel!'

'Yes, mother, it is I,' he replied, as he walked forward towards her. He clasped her in his great strong arms, and for some minutes there was silence, save for the soft muffled sounds of an irregular breathing.

'Let me go with you, Gabriel,' Mrs. Bewglass was saying, composedly, some little time after. 'This has made me older, and we had better live together. It matters little where we are.'

'It matters more, mother, than you think. You might as well talk of removing

the chestnut on the green and planting it on the Thames Embankment, as of going to live in London yourself. From the point of mere pounds, shillings, and pence we could manage it well enough ; but, my dear mother, you know nothing of the change of conditions it would mean. Bah ! the thing is impossible. The friends within your reach on one hundred and thirty a-year !' the speaker laughed aloud at the thought which he enunciated. ' You, mother ! in the midst of those surroundings ! You would not survive a twelve-month : and I am sure I should speedily follow at the mere sight of the thing. No, no, mother ; you leave the plans to me. Will you abide by my decisions ?'

He smiled as he looked towards her.

' I can hardly trust you, Gabriel.'

' You can do so this time. Do you know who is buying the furniture ?'

The old lady looked at him with an inquiring gaze.

‘Haven’t they been to tell you? I went down a few minutes ago to rescue some things I wanted, and I was quietly informed by an important old gentleman there that he had a commission to buy in everything—every stick in the place—*for us!* Is this the first you have heard about it?’

Mrs. Bewglass’s face was a sufficient answer to his inquiry.

‘It is amazing enough, certainly, and I hardly know what to think of it. But we can leave that for the present. Will you give me full authority, mother, to settle things as seems best to me?’

‘Do you promise to do nothing rashly, Gabriel?’ replied the mother, looking at him gravely. ‘It is little use my talking to you, for I have lost all influence over you, I see. You *will* have your own way at last.’

‘That is perfectly true, so you had

better submit graciously. Invest me with full powers, mother.'

'You will not borrow money?'

'No, that I certainly shall not: none, at least, beyond this sum that somebody is expending on the furniture. You will not refuse to accept that, will you?'

The answer was delayed, as Gabriel expected it to be. When it came it was not an answer to the question.

'I must think for a little time about it.'

'That is certainly reasonable enough: now for another point. You are quite right, mother, in saying that we must live together: you shall not be alone again. But neither shall you leave this village. I shall come and live with you here.'

'But, Gabriel, how is that possible? Your appointment——'

'My appointment can go to—the winds. I have no particular passion for it. I hear that poor old Coldicott is dead, and that no successor is yet appointed. I shall

apply to be made parish clerk. There is that nice little cottage and garden, besides the two acres of land and some trifling stipend, which are appurtenant to the office, and I will make shift for a living. That is to what you have to agree, mother.'

The lady regarded her son for some moments in perplexity before venturing a remark.

'My dear boy, such a course is impossible: so many things are against it. You, the parish clerk!'

'Nothing more nor less than that,' replied Gabriel, with the calmest decision. There was no mistaking his seriousness.

'But it would not be right for you to have it, Gabriel; for there are so many poor men who will be naturally expecting the place, and for one of whom it is certainly intended. We must not deprive them of a living.'

'Of that, too, I have thought. Many

would make the objection, but it has no weight at all with me. I consider that the services of my father and yourself entitle us to such a trifling return from the people. Nor is that the only point : I know that far more good will result to the village people themselves from your continuing to live here than there would from one of their number getting old Coldicott's cottage : and this is the only way I can see of keeping you in the village. To me, too, the step would be a deliverance, a greater one than can be easily imagined.'

'Yes, that is it,' said his mother, with a sigh. 'But, Gabriel, we could not possibly live on that. I know——'

'No, we could not ; but leave all that to me, mother. I will provide you a maintenance honestly : only agree to the proposition. You cannot refuse to do so.'

'But, Gabriel, you are throwing yourself away. You are made for great things.'

‘So are a great many men now-a-days, mother, and they generally end in doing nothing. Let me first show that I can do little things. No man is too good for any office in the kingdom, if he uses all its opportunities. It is quite likely that I should find a better work for my hand to do as the parish clerk of Shipcombe than as a nonentity in Her Majesty’s office of Sewers.’

‘Yes, it may be,’ mused Mrs. Bewglass.
‘But we shall deprive some poor man.’

‘I have sufficiently answered that objection, mother; and, mark my word, nobody at least shall regret my appointment, —if I get it, of course. I feel little fear of that; for Mr. Kimble said it is promised to nobody, and that he as churchwarden will support me.’

‘Mr. Kimble says so!’ cried his mother.
‘I should have thought he was the last man——’

‘So he is; but I made him. You for-

get, mother, that when I have a will, I allow nobody else to have one.'

'Just like your uncle Roland. Then I submit, boy, and you may make what arrangements you like.'

'Good, brave mother!' said the young man, crossing over to kiss her. 'You shall be happy again yet.'

The lady's eyes were full when Gabriel's face was removed, but a smile played upon her features.

'I will go and see Mr. Silverside at once,' remarked Bewglass, standing erect before the fireplace. 'I can't rest until it is settled.'

'I thought that would be the next thing. Run away, I must get Ruth's dinner; she will be here in a few minutes. There are the children coming out. We will keep the dinner on the table, but we can't wait after half-past twelve.'

Gabriel accordingly departed, and when Miss Sulby had seen him pass out of the

gateway she crossed over to the house.

In the vicarage library Mr. Silverside was sitting at the table writing a letter. The sliding of his smooth quill pen upon the paper and the peculiar murmur of the flames in the grate were the chief sounds which broke the silence of the room. One other there was, occurring at intervals, resembling the rustle of a page turned over in the fingers. This latter proceeded from a second figure in the room, a young lady who occupied a low chair by the fire, reading a book which lay in her lap. A large dog lay asleep upon the hearthrug.

It was not a large room, but of capacity enough to offer an appearance of almost luxurious comfort. Every inch of the walls all round to within two feet of the ceiling (over the doorway and mantel-piece only excepted) was clothed with books in imposing array, and, judging by the aroma as much as by the appearance, all sumptuously

bound. A rich tapestry curtain hung in folds before the door, of pattern corresponding with the pair which flanked the window. In a corner of the books, behind the chair now occupied by the reader, was a movable lectern of carved oak, the shaft being in the form of a wyvern or some such strange winged beast from the heraldic world, which by conjecture represented the crest of the reverend owner. Representative busts, exclusively of men of letters, presided over the bookshelves, the two best known of Scott by Chantrey being conspicuous among the number. The life-size half-figure of a most venerable personage looked placidly from the canvas which hung over the fireplace. On the mantelpiece beneath was an imposing time-piece in the form of a lighthouse, the head of which slowly and silently revolved, presenting alternately a clock-face and a barometer; and on each side of it, on the wall above the extremities of the chimney-

piece, was a bracket oil-lamp of tasteful design. There were, of course, very many other things which might have attracted the eye, such as the peculiar tiles of the broad hearth, fantastic dog and fire-irons, newspaper-rack, curious inkstand and paper-knife, scraps of coloured glass, presumably ancient, representing a glorified head, or an angel's wing, or what not, suspended against the window-panes,—all of which seemed to pronounce the clerical proprietor a virtuoso of marked taste.

Presently the quill pen ceased, and a fist was drawn over the blotting-paper. When the envelope was gummed, Mr. Silverside rose from his chair. He smiled at the sight of his daughter bending over the folio before her, and walked across to her side. The step was scarce audible upon the rich carpet, and the young lady started as her father's arm was placed upon her shoulder. She raised her hand upwards to his.

‘Now, Dolly, anent what are these absorbing researches? The Monasticon?’

‘Yes, father. Old Giles Radway thinks that there was an abbey at Shipcombe once——’

‘You needn’t have strained your muscles over that folio, my little girl, to find out your worthy friend’s error, your illiterate father could have saved you the trouble. There is no such foundation recorded.’

‘I thought so. Poor old man, he will be disappointed, for it is a pet theory of his.’

‘But, Doll, away with your folios! I had forgotten this merchandise,’ exclaimed the clergyman, as his eye caught sight of a substantial brown paper parcel lying upon the floor by his table. ‘Come, let us tackle it!’

The young lady jumped up with alacrity and seized the parcel to undo it.

‘Why, Doll, you are as eager as your demented father. By the Turk!’ he

shouted, as Dorothy handed him the first volume from the parcel. 'A royal copy. Bernard never deceives us. Was that a knock?'

'Mr. Bewglass, sir, wishes to see you,' said the housemaid, when she entered.

'Mr. Bewglass?' remarked the vicar, interrogatively, looking up from the colophon of the book he was holding.

'Mrs. Bewglass's son, father,' suggested Dorothy, looking up from the parcel of books.

'O, of course, of course. Ask Mr. Bewglass to come in here, Jane.'

Miss Silverside rose from the floor.

'Leave them there, Dolly. We will look at them afterwards. You had better withdraw.'

As the young lady reached the door, Gabriel was on the point of entering. She glanced sideways into his face, and Bewglass stood aside for her to pass him. A graceful movement acknowledged his

action, and Miss Silverside went away to the drawing-room.

One may imagine the feelings with which Gabriel surveyed the house upon this first entry since the time of his mother's leaving it. The stairs and the walls were in the same places as before, else he might have doubted its being the place of his childhood: such a change was there in everything about it. It was transformed under the magic of upholstery. It was with a feeling of positive awe that he stepped into that fragrant library, little subject to nervousness as he was. The feeling had scarce time to possess him before it was interrupted by the kindly greeting which the vicar extended to him. Gabriel, as we know, did not share in the vulgar opinion of the new vicar; but he had hardly been prepared for this apparently genial reception. He had only once spoken to Mr. Silverside previously, for a few minutes in the open air, and upon

that occasion he was friendly enough ; but to-day they met under different circumstances. Some little uneasiness would not have been unnatural ; neither of them seemed to feel it. With whatever feeling Bewglass had come to the interview, he had not been engaged in it for many minutes before he was aware of a strong personal liking for Mr. Silverside ; it very rapidly developed into a whole-hearted admiration of the man. The vicar made no kind of reference to the evil circumstances of Gabriel's household ; nor did he give his visitor an opportunity of opening the subject at once.

‘Sit down, Mr. Bewglass,’ said the host, pointing to the easy-chair which Dorothy had vacated. ‘I have been thinking about you for a few days, and I am very glad to see you. Your father did not worry himself over these baubles, I believe.’

The remark was made as Gabriel took the chair, for in doing so he had, almost

involuntarily, cast a glance upon the imposing book-shelves which surrounded him. The clergyman's tone quite as much as his bearing was free from the slightest taint of patronage. That it was genuinely so, Bewglass's instinctive feelings towards him gave infallible testimony; for the young man was of north-country extraction, and he was not without a good share of the super-sensitive pride of his forbears. No mere appearance in such a matter could have deceived him.

‘No, Mr. Silverside, he did not collect many books.’

‘I have lately got on to the hopeless track of missals and illuminated manuscripts,’ remarked the vicar, with a smile, ‘so you see I am rather far gone. It is a terrible frenzy. You live in London, do you not?’

‘I draw my breath there; but it can scarcely be called living where one can feel no sympathy with anything around.’

The vicar viewed his visitor with interest; Gabriel's answer was not what he had expected, and it gave promise of some originality,—a quality which Mr. Silverside was not without the power to appreciate.

‘I am dissatisfied with it, Mr. Silverside, and on that account I have taken the liberty of calling upon you.’

‘I am glad you have done so; if I can be of the slightest use, I hope you will not hesitate to ask me.’

‘The parish clerkship is vacant, and I am desirous of obtaining the post. I wish to ask for your support; I have that of the churchwardens.’

Again Mr. Silverside regarded him; Gabriel coolly returned his gaze.

‘Mr. Bewglass, you are a brave man, if you will excuse my taking the liberty of saying so. Before directly answering your request, may I, without impertinence, ask you a question or two. You had a legal training?’

‘ Yes, sir, I had.’

‘ You qualified for a solicitor, I believe?’

‘ Yes, I did, but I was never what they call admitted.’

Gabriel began to feel some surprise at the intimacy with his history which this gentleman was displaying. He was not aware of having occupied one moment of Mr. Silverside’s thoughts before his entry to the room.

‘ You now hold an appointment in a government office—some legal office?’

‘ I do, Mr. Silverside. I obtained it because I felt wholly incompetent to grapple with the details of a private legal practice. I wish now to resign it in order that I may live in the country with my mother; and, if you think I am a suitable candidate, this parish clerkship seems to be a favourable opportunity.’

‘ But could you not obtain some post in a country office which would afford you the same result?’

‘I should prefer manual labour; it is what I am better fitted for.’

‘Had you never an inclination for farming?’

‘I had; but of course no opportunity for indulging it.’

‘You have suggested the parish clerkship, Mr. Bewglass, as a suitable post for you,’ said the clergyman, rising from his chair; ‘would you be disposed to give any consideration to an alternative proposition, if I made one? That would depend upon the tenor of it, you think,’ he added, smiling. ‘Well, it is this: Would you feel disposed to accept a very small land agency, if it were offered you?’

Bewglass was some seconds before he replied.

‘Such a post, I think, I could fill efficiently,’ he said at last; ‘but the locality would be the difficulty. I should be loth to go any distance from this village.’

‘The one of which I was thinking would enable you to reside in this village, if you thought fit. The whole matter is this, Mr. Bewglass. I have recently come into possession of the Haverton estate,—a comparatively small one, as probably you know, but, together with the church property, it is more than I care to be bothered with myself. I have decided to look out, therefore, for a suitable man to act as agent. Of course, the usual course would have been to combine it with one of the farms on the estate, or give it to somebody in the town; but, if you take the offer in good part, I should have the greatest pleasure in putting it before you. It is, as I say, a trifling affair; I don’t see how I could attach more than a hundred a-year to the office, in the present state of rents, and there would be no house appurtenant to it. Should any farm become vacant, you should have the first offer, but that is the utmost I can

promise. Is it worth your consideration ?'

'Consideration !' exclaimed Gabriel, with a smile. 'It would not require much of my consideration, Mr. Silverside. I would resign even the parish clerkship for that. I should only require your patience for a twelvemonth, for of course I should be new to the work. Mr. Kimble would, I know, give me any practical assistance. If you thought fit to offer me such a post at one half the salary mentioned, I could have no hesitation in accepting it.'

'Then, Mr. Bewglass, it is offered and accepted, and you have helped me out of a dilemma. We will begin from the first of January, and you can take up your residence whenever you find it convenient. I presume you will have to give some notice of the resignation of your present post. Do not engage in things too hurriedly. If you have the slightest change of opinion upon maturer consideration, the matter can be ended as easily as it has been en-

gaged in. No doubt you will let me know your final decision about it. If you persist in accepting the post, you will let me know when you can be settled here, and we can go into practical details. I have but indifferent plans of the property, so that one of the first steps would be to construct a new one—but that is beside the question. Think seriously of all sides of the matter, for I should be sorry to entice you to a step which you might at any time find cause to regret.’

‘I can only offer my warmest thanks, Mr. Silverside, for your kindness,’ said Bewglass, rising up from his chair. ‘It shall be gravely considered,’ he proceeded, smiling, ‘and you shall have my final answer before I return to London. I will not interrupt you longer.’

‘But you will have a bit of luncheon with us. We shall be sitting down directly.’

‘Please excuse me, Mr. Silverside. I

have a great deal to do, and I must return to-night.'

'Certainly, if you really feel unable to stay. Good-morning,' he said, receiving the grasp of Gabriel's hand with pleasure. 'I am at liberty, then, to entertain other applications for the parish clerkship,' continued the clergyman, as the two walked out into the hall.

'Yes, I withdraw from the competition.'

'Good-morning; good-morning.'

Bewglass returned to the school in an extreme state of exhilaration. As I have said, he had never for a moment regarded his father's successor in an unfriendly light, although it is not easy for the most generously-minded of us to view with enthusiasm a wealthy man whom circumstances seem to place in an attitude of opposition to our own unfortunate poverty. Gabriel had not pretended to bestow any warm

feeling upon Mr. Silverside ; he had merely extended a feeling of justice towards him. The young man was philosophical enough to look at the circumstances reasonably, from an unprejudiced point of view, and he had seen that the present vicar had not any personal connection with the unfortunate state of affairs which overwhelmed the family of his predecessor. The law was responsible, and not Mr. Silverside. Gabriel had never expected the law, even in matters ecclesiastical, to give way to the gospel.

This interview, however, had changed Bewglass's former attitude of cool justice to a feeling of a very different texture. When he had first entered the vicarage and been struck by the altered aspect of things in that old house, no vulgar resentment nor envy had disturbed his equanimity. Nobody could have experienced more keenly the delight of calling such an abode his home, had fortune only seen fit

to favour him so far, than this Gabriel Bewglass himself; but because it was denied him, even because the plain gear which had hitherto made up his humbler home was denied him, and was at this moment ringing under the auctioneer's hammer, he was not conscious of any thirst for destruction as regarded either the owner or the property. Human treatment, acting upon this generous groundwork, had set Gabriel's soul a-fire. If he had entered the house with indifference, he had left it in another state of feeling.

It has been stated that Bewglass was of north-country extraction,—in fact, his father had come direct from the border,—so that his temperament was but an inheritance of some of the better characteristics of his race. The feeling with which he left the vicarage was the same that had driven his forbears to battle. Gabriel would have fought for his new ally the vicar; he felt an ardent personal affection

for the man. Probably Mr. Silverside's good qualities were considerably magnified when reflected in Bewglass's imagination ; in fact, it is to be feared that the universe scarce affords such a creation as that one of Gabriel's brain. Nothing was too noble for its nature ; no devotion could be warm enough for its deserts.

In this excited state did the young man walk up the village road. How different the whole place appeared to him ! He laughed at the thought of that fat auctioneer, but with an intense inclination to go and chastise him with not over small cords. Those offensive jokes which he had interrupted,—that roaring crew all round ;—but what has caused the sudden change ? What ails you, Gabriel, that you stand there ? standing in the very centre of the highway, with a look so difficult of construction ? He caused nobody surprise by the movement, for there was nobody there

to see him; the check must have come from within.

Yes, it was a thought which had at that moment occurred to him. In recalling that scene of the sale-room, his own mission there had naturally recurred, and with it the astonishing revelation of Mr. Philpin. In a moment everything was clear; this further action pronounced it. It was exactly the thing he would do, was the enthusiastic verdict of Gabriel's mind. Mr. Silverside had given that commission.

Bewglass entered the school-house in a playful frame of mind. He exchanged an ordinary greeting with Miss Sulby, and then flung himself into a chair. His mother regarded him anxiously, and immediately read his face.

‘Now come, boy,’ she said, ‘you have kept us waiting long enough, for Ruth would not begin without you. Sit up to the table at once, and carve for us.’

‘I want no dinner, mother.’

‘But perhaps somebody else does. That is a polite attitude for a guest.’

‘I beg your pardon, Miss Sulby,’ replied Gabriel, laughing aloud. ‘I am sorry that you waited for me.’

The three took their seats at the table, and Bewglass carved the cold meat. It was simple fare enough, but there was decided contentment therewith. The ladies took their note from Gabriel’s countenance.

‘Well, mother, I have got it,’ he exclaimed, when they had begun their meal.

‘You are going to be parish clerk?’ retorted Miss Sulby, unable to restrain the words.

‘That was said in a tone of surprise. Why should my conduct cause you any surprise, Miss Sulby?’

He assumed every appearance of gravity as he put the question to her. Ruth felt it to be a reproof.

‘Extraordinary things do cause us sur-

prise, whether we will or no, Mr. Bewglass.'

'That is an evasion, and not a reason at all. Come, your reason, Miss Sulby, your reason. Possibly you, too, think me too good for the office. Is that it?'

'That is one thing certainly.'

'A foolish one: but that argument we will postpone. One thing I have learned by my visit, mother, and that is an explanation of the furniture mystery. Mr. Silverside is buying it for us.'

Ruth was busy with her plate, and did not venture to look up for a few seconds.

'Mr. Silverside!' exclaimed Mrs. Bewglass.

'Don't think he told me so. He is not a man to do things like that: he is, in fact, the soundest man I have encountered these many ages. I have gathered it by inference; infallible inference, though. I am not often deceived in my impressions, and I would stake my reputation upon this point. It is like him.'

‘Gabriel, I am amazed.’

‘Are you amazed, Miss Sulby?’

‘Not exactly amazed. I should think Mr. Silverside is a very good-natured man when he wishes to be.’

‘Humph! That is a very guarded statement,’ observed Bewglass, with a smile. ‘You were always rather cautious, Miss Sulby. Did you know, mother, that Mr. Silverside had come into the Haverton estate?’

‘Yes, it was mentioned in the paper.’

‘Perhaps the one *you* didn’t address to me;’—his mother started—‘yes, I understand, mother. I got it, though. If I had had the sense to look at it when it came, I might have saved you some heart-ache. I never saw it until ten o’clock last night. Well, the vicar wants an agent to look after his property, and asks me if I can recommend one. It is a nice question to ask a penniless wretch, isn’t it?’

Ruth gave one scrutinizing glance at the face opposite to her. That he was buoyed up by some extraordinary lightness of heart had been obvious from the moment of his entrance; but the two ladies had attributed it merely to the success of his original plans. Ruth was now more than suspicious.

‘You recommended yourself, Mr. Bewglass, I should think,’ she remarked.

‘Yes, I did, Miss Sulby. Would you approve the recommendation?’

‘Entirely; the most suitable that the country could afford.’

‘Best of all, the vicar accepted the recommendation, and the post is now at my service. It is true, mother. It is really true,’ he continued, ‘incomprehensible as it may seem. Mr. Silverside offers me the appointment with a hundred a-year salary. May I accept it, mother?’

‘Is he quite serious, Ruth? I cannot understand the boy sometimes.’

‘Yes, he is serious, Mrs. Bewglass,’ replied Ruth, laughing.

The mother regarded her son for a second and then stepped to his chair. ‘God bless you, Gabriel,’ she said, as she stooped to kiss him. The old lady then returned to her seat.

‘I am quite convinced that he has gone out of his way to make the appointment for me; and, if a man would do that, he would not hesitate at buying in the furniture. I believe it has been a regular scheme of his. He is buying it.’

‘It really looks like it; doesn’t it, Ruth?’

‘It does, indeed.’

‘Why, I know of nobody else that would do such a thing; at least nobody that has the money wherewith to do it.’

‘But Mr. Kimble——’

Gabriel laughed immoderately.

‘Nobody likes Kimble better than I do, mother, and nobody knows him better. He

will wear himself out in personal services for anybody that deserves it, but at cash he draws the line. What do you say, Miss Sulby ?’

‘I think you are right, Mr. Bewglass,’ replied Ruth, with a smile corresponding to that of the querist.

This turn in the conversation had made Miss Sulby rather nervous, although below that it afforded her infinite amusement. She had at no time felt that there was the least likelihood of detection ; but she was genuinely thankful to this other incident for having so opportunely interposed to remove any slightest risk. She could see very clearly that Gabriel’s mind was resolutely made up upon the point, and she knew how much it would require to alter any such decision in him, so that she was able to command herself better than she had expected.

They were not long engaged with dinner. Normally, to anyone of the three, meals

were but a secondary consideration, and to-day they had less appetite than usual. Very soon the school-mistress found it necessary to withdraw, her dinner-hour having already expired, and the children were growing noisy outside. Gabriel promised to be there when she came out at four, a request which Ruth herself had made to him: with this Miss Sulby departed.

She had scarce stepped upon the pavement outside when a gentleman appeared in the gateway, a gentleman of imposing appearance. He was clothed in a dark coloured suit, the frock coat of which was buttoned tightly before him: upon his head was a tall shining hat. This latter article was very speedily removed as the wearer caught sight of the school-mistress, and she waited for the gentleman to come up. He carried a roll of paper in his hand.

‘Is it over, Mr. Philpin?’ asked Ruth,

whilst the visitor was preparing a fitting oration.

‘Fully complete and ended, Miss Sulby ; not one article escaped us. Will you step in that we may go through the catalogue ? I am grieved that I must hurry back to town immediately.’

‘It is hardly necessary to do that. I have to go in to the children. I have absolute faith in you, and I am more indebted to you than I can express. You have come at a most opportune moment, and I will take you in to Mrs. Bewglass. They are fully prepared, and you will have no difficulty with them. You know what we decided to say.’

‘But you too will be present, Miss Sulby. My journey will be——’

‘I must go into school ; besides, it would be impertinent of me ; they are Mrs. Bewglass’s private affairs. Was the money sufficient ?’

‘There is a small balance in your favour,

Miss Sulby ; but I will make out a statement of account——’

‘Come in, Mr. Philpin.’

‘Here is a gentleman wishes to speak to you, Mrs. Bewglass,’ said Ruth, when she had re-entered the house.

Mr. Philpin was ushered in and the school-mistress made her escape.

Gabriel put the visitor at his ease, and they were presently discussing the object of his visit.

‘I am entrusted with a delicate commission, Mrs. Bewglass,’ the gentleman began.

‘I have explained matters to my mother, Mr. Philpin,’ interposed Gabriel.

‘Thank you, sir, thank you. The way then is clear for me. I have, then, madam, only to ask you, on behalf of a client who wishes to be nameless, to accept the furniture of which this is a schedule.’

He opened the scroll in his hand.

‘But is it the whole of it, Mr. Philpin?’ asked Gabriel.

‘The whole of it, sir.’

‘My mother wishes me to be spokesman,’ Bewglass continued, ‘and on her behalf, Mr. Philpin, I must beg you to convey to the nameless client of whom you speak Mrs. Bewglass’s deepest thanks. Seeing the delicate way in which the astonishing generosity has been extended to her, she considers that it would be false sentiment in her if she should hesitate to accept it. The only condition which Mrs. Bewglass attaches to the acceptance is that your client will allow the presentation to be in the nature of a loan, repayable at such time as circumstances will permit.’

‘That condition I am authorised to accept, sir, if Mrs. Bewglass wishes to impose it.’

‘Then I may say again, Mr. Philpin, that Mrs. Bewglass accepts your client’s munificent offer with the deepest sense of

his generosity,'—Mr. Philpin looked up quickly at the pronoun which Gabriel had used, but passed off the involuntary movement—'and trusts to you to convey to him an expression of her warmest thanks.'

'Such an expression it will be my pleasure to convey, Mr. Bewglass, to the right quarter.'

'I am sure, Gabriel, that our thanks are also due to Mr. Philpin,' interposed Mrs. Bewglass, 'for all the trouble he has taken in the matter.'

'That they are,' cried Gabriel.

'It has been a labour of—a real, real pleasure to me, madam, I assure you. I cannot express to you the pleasure with which I have engaged in the matter, and I consider it an honour and a privilege to have been entrusted with the conduct of it. I am sorry that I am obliged to hasten away, but I must now ask you to excuse me. The sale has detained me longer than I expected.'

‘I will walk down with you, Mr. Philpin,’ said Bewglass. ‘You are driving, I expect?’

‘Yes, sir.’

Mr. Philpin took a courtly leave of Mrs. Bewglass, and the two set off down the village.

CHAPTER IX.

WIFEHOOD.

WHEN the clouds of winter were finally dispersed, and the sun had again begun seriously to regard the earth, he beheld two or three small changes in that insignificant village of Shipcombe which had taken place there since his retirement into winter quarters. It had been a custom of his on these spring mornings, as soon as he had surmounted that green hill-top, to peer, with especial interest, between the deeply wrinkled trunks of two great elm trees, right into the windows of a particular cottage, and he had seldom failed to encounter there the bright morning visage

of a comely young woman. It had always been his delight to snatch a first kiss from her as she leaned over the milk-pans or busied herself with the churn, and his face would sparkle with glee as she blinked before the power of his rays, trying to escape him.

Morning after morning he now looked, but with constant disappointment. He could see the same stone floor which he knew so well, every stone of it just as he had left it, but that shadow upon them was wanting. The same vessels were there, upon that stone slab by the wall, but no face leaned over them. One morning in May, as he looked with anger into that deserted place—he had been looking long, and he could only glance from the corner of his eye as the hour of his appointment fast waned—still he looked, reluctant to withdraw, and there was a movement in the room. He was to be rewarded at last. A figure entered that doorway and blinked

in his rays ; but no, it was not she : somebody very different, indeed, for whom the sun did not feel inclined to linger. Those cheeks were old and bearded, the hair was grey, and the eyes, though clear, were not like hers. He withdrew his last rays from the wall and left the old man to skim the milk alone.

Many other windows did the orb gaze into in his search for that favourite figure, but from all he had to turn in disappointment. In the house which Joice had got no windows faced the morning sun.

Joice Radway had left that cottage then—had changed her name and, very materially, her mode of life. She had been, for nearly five months, a wife, and, although the sun was unable to catch her at her work, it by no means meant that she was finding her newly-acquired dignity a sinecure. It was far from that. But her labour was to her a delight, and she would not have asked for it to be lightened. She

had never connected her marriage with ease, nor had the fates any surprise in store for her in this particular direction. So long as she might work for *him*, Joice knew nothing but contentment. Possibly she had experienced some sentimental disappointment, but for that she blamed her own foolishness. Women were proverbially foolish, and she was but an illustration of the rule.

Wayfer was positively kind to her, in his own peculiar fashion. She had outstripped all his expectations of her, and he occasionally showed his satisfaction by a word or even a caress. Nobody was as happy as Joice upon these particular occasions: she felt that the earth had little more to give. They were, however, but like angels' visits, and it was in the intervals that the young wife sometimes felt the shadow. After a day of incessant toil, her weariness would have been forgotten, nay, would have been very positively rejoiced

in, if she had had some haven of sentiment wherein to collect her feelings, and in the shelter of which she might furnish herself with sails for the toilsome voyage of the morrow. That haven was never reached.

Her husband was pledged to business, and everything about him was sacrificed to his god. He had a shop in the High Street of Dormantley, bearing the imposing title of the 'Cotswold Farm Stores,' and in this centred the whole of his energies; his farm, his wife, his money, himself, all existed for the promotion of this scheme alone. He was not a man to make others slave in order to keep himself in idleness; he himself worked harder than any. Morning and evening found him active; when it was dark he went to bed. This retirement was not caused so much by the common need of rest as by the sheer impossibility of carrying on his work. His wife could frequently hear him grumble against the waste of these hours of darkness.

With the practical working of his plans they gradually matured in his mind. Wayfer shared the common opinion of farmers upon the outlook of British agriculture. Even his father had been losing money, so that he had a very tangible groundwork for his opinions; it was this tendency of things, so far as it concerned him, that he was setting himself to counteract. It appeared to him that he had hit upon the only method of doing it. Old systems had proved themselves worn out; corn-growing did not pay, stock-rearing did little better. Did it not behove him, if only for self-preservation, to find out something new?

In the five months during which his establishment had been on trial he had found good reason for encouragement. There was a small but steady increase in the receipts, and nobody could ask for more. Wayfer admitted this, and his devotion to his venture was intensified accordingly.

Satisfactory, then, as circumstances seemed to be with him, there was one chafing element which remains to be mentioned. This was necessarily a rather important one, seeing that it affected the very base-work of his enterprise. It was, in fact, nothing less than the relationship between a tenant and his landlord.

From the outset Wayfer had felt some slight misgiving upon this subject. He had been dissatisfied with the attitude which the vicar had from the first assumed towards his enterprise; but now he had an evil to contend with to which the clergyman's indifference was a mere nothing. The vicar had appointed an agent.

It was hardly to be expected that Michael Wayfer's kindly feeling towards Bewglass should have increased. Gabriel's apparent indifference to this self-constituted antagonist was, moreover, not likely to remove any rankling feeling in the latter. Wayfer was not deceived. Dense as he

was in the construction of many phases of feeling, he had a tolerable understanding of this one.

Since Bewglass's settlement in his new capacity, there had been necessarily much intercourse between the two. Throughout the whole of it Gabriel had assumed the coolest business attitude. It was simply yes or no, to any proposition from the tenant; with a preponderance, so the tenant averred, of the negative. Every shadow of difference in opinion on the part of Bewglass was, of course, attributed to malicious motives by the other; and throughout the whole of those repairs to the buildings there were many such differences. The tenant now viewed his farm as the means of supplying his 'Stores'; the agent viewed it as a farm for the most part arable, and had the buildings repaired with a view to the requirements of such a holding. Gabriel was spending much time in studying text-books, as well as the

agricultural customs of his district, and in them the alterations proposed by Wayfer found no place. So many acres of pasture land warranted accommodation for so many head of cattle, and to this Bewglass resolutely kept. Wayfer wanted additional pig-sties: Bewglass had no funds. New fowl-house: no funds.

These disappointments had caused the tenant increased vexation; but they did not in any way daunt him. They strengthened him rather in a stubborn resolve to succeed in his enterprise in spite of all the landlord's impediments. Wayfer had long since imbibed much of the agrarian discontent which so few in his position now-a-days escape: and these personal considerations led him to dwell more seriously upon it. He said that he could not carry on the farm as it had hitherto been carried on, for he was losing by it; and immediately he endeavoured to counteract this adverse tendency by means reasonably suited to

the altered conditions of things, he was hampered by the restrictions of a landlord who was wholly ignorant of practical requirements.

These grumblings, of course, must inevitably have arisen, whether Gabriel Bewglass or another had been the superintendent. We have no reason for supposing that the agent did more than was his duty. He had, at any rate, fully discussed the matter with his reverend principal, and had received the amplest authority for what he did. Little more could reasonably be required of him. It was true that the tenant himself discerned personal malevolence in his treatment; but this particular consideration served rather to strengthen his stubborn determination to succeed, than to add fuel to his anti-landlord notions. These latter were of old standing with him, but were not uppermost in this recent undertaking.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that

Wayfer's marriage had not developed any hidden sentiment in him. His wife Joice had to accept him as he was. If she had asked for bread, and got instead of it a stone, it was nevertheless a stone which was indispensable to her, and which she would continue to hug to her breast notwithstanding the chill which it caused her, and the obvious impossibility of imparting to it any warmth from herself.

This attitude of content was, of course, the very one suited to Wayfer's disposition. Any display of dissatisfaction with her lot, or of impatience at his fixed idea, would have led to an uproar at once. Not that the young farmer ever had the faintest suspicion of his wife's true state of mind. He did not tolerate her for her patience, for he did not know that she had any : he simply praised her for being so admirably adapted to his needs. In whatever direction he turned, he found her ever his ready counterpart. This was all he could

see: her exterior was a stone wall to him as regarded anything that went on behind it.

He would occasionally congratulate himself upon his escape from that thin-faced school-mistress. When he thought of his state of mind at that time, he could scarcely credit that it had appertained to himself. If he dwelt long enough upon the matter, he could yet discern some sort of a feeling towards Miss Sulby which he was quite free from in regard to his wife; but it was such a feeling as he now took delight in defying. He could laugh at that former madness and thank his stars that he had recovered his senses. Joice fulfilled everyone of his requirements, and he doubted if that other would have fulfilled any. She would not have paid for her keep, let alone the wages for a woman to look after the dairy. Joice scarcely took any keeping, and was herself the 'day-woman' without wages.

In addition to Joice's more material recommendations, she had one or two of a less obvious kind. Her patience has already been mentioned: this constituted her the very perfection of a listener. With Wayfer this was rather important: in certain moods he required somebody to talk at. Joice had even once or twice exceeded this, and had shown herself a competent adviser; in this, however, she seldom indulged. She was generally a mute listener. These colloquies were confined almost entirely to Sunday nights, when Wayfer and his wife occupied the parlour; upon no other occasion did they sit there, for on week-days they were at work until bed-time. Joice naturally looked forward to Sunday.

Of late even these evenings had been interfered with, for a third had been added to the company. Ever since the installation of Clinkscles behind that counter in the High Street, it had been a custom for him to spend all Sunday at Sedgecomb. He

generally arrived there about noon, and in the dark days he left by five : now that the evenings were getting longer he stayed as long as the daylight. Although there was no conversation but what turned upon business, still Joice preferred to sit with her husband alone. Of this last paltry satisfaction was she now deprived.

One such evening they were sitting there engaged in the usual kind of conversation. It was about the end of May and the sun was sinking in the north-west. Joice sat by the window regarding the prospect, or at least having the appearance of doing so ; Wayfer was at the table with some papers. Clinkscale occupied an easy-chair, smoking a pipe and having a jug and tumbler within easy reach upon the table.

This latter gentleman had not very greatly altered since we last saw him. It was true that, owing to the satisfactory progress of the stores, Wayfer had given

his henchman an honorarium or two, but Clinkscales was not the man to expend any such godsend in so unprofitable a direction as the improvement of his personal appearance. He still looked the incarnation of shabbiness. It is rather doubtful, in fact, whether mere expenditure could in any case have remedied this appearance. It is quite possible that Clinkscales was one of those men who defy all sartorial art by natural misfortune. Happily nature had palliated the shortcoming by endowing the subject of it with the utmost indifference upon the matter.

‘More land, Michael,’ Christopher was remarking, as he replaced the tumbler upon the table, and sucked the liquor from his overhanging moustachios; ‘it’s more land that you want, if you’re to keep the place supplied with your own stock.’

‘It’s not more land,’ replied Wayfer, rather savagely; ‘but a different landlord.

There's plenty of land here if it was only properly laid out, and proper buildings with it. They get the rent, but they don't care how you are to make it.'

'That's a truism an' all,' said Clinkscates. 'I wish you'd heard the lecture in the market-place the other night, Michael, and you'd have known something more about that.'

'Never mind the lecture ; they don't tell us how to mend things, and that's what I want. If it weren't for the cursed loss I'd jack up the place altogether and take another ; but I've gone too far now. I must go on for a couple of years, at any rate.'

'You needn't give it up, but you could take another little mixed place as well, where you could do what you liked.'

'It won't pay, Mr. Clinkscates. I do want it, I know, but it won't pay.'

'They say that Ephraim Riley is going

to leave his place, Michael,' interposed the wife from the window. 'Would that be any good?'

'It's about the filthiest land in the country,' said Wayfer. 'Better have the high-road.'

'Nay, Michael,' asserted Clinkscapes, 'that's just the kind of place you want. There's a bit of good fruit; and the land would do well for pigs, geese and turkeys. Riley has neglected it.'

'If it would do, Michael,' continued Joice; 'I should think Riley would work there for you and look after the place.'

'That man! I wouldn't have him to clean out my pigsties.'

'But wait a bit,' was Clinkscapes' comment. 'Joice is right, Michael. You could get him to do it cheap. If he'd got you to look after him, things 'ud be different. By gum, that's the place you want. I can work Riley well enough. I'd make

him agree to it. That's the place you want, and you'd better not miss the chance.'

Wayfer was silent for a minute or two. He did not care to be persuaded by other people, more especially if he had shown himself averse from the step in the first place. Nevertheless, as he thought of this proposition, he could not deny that there was a savour of wisdom in it. It was the word cheap which had attracted him. He was cursed with the necessity of doing things cheaply, and certainly no other consideration would have induced him to entertain the thought of negotiations with that kinsman of his. Probably had he known the real state of Riley's feelings towards himself even this one would have failed to affect him; but his supreme contempt for his sister's husband kept him ignorant of the real nature of the man. He did therefore give Joice's proposition a moment's serious consideration, with the result apparently of

modifying his first hasty expression of opinion.

‘It’s an old tale that of Riley giving up the place,’ was his first remark after the pause. ‘The bailiffs have been coming in any day these last twelve months, if all folks were true.’

‘But it is true this time that they are going to leave,’ observed Joice. ‘Mrs. Riley told my father about it.’

‘True enough,’ said Clinkscapes. ‘We might see him at any rate, Michael. There ’d be no harm done.’

After a further short silence, Wayfer gave a tardy assent to this uncompromising course. It was not now that he hesitated over the expediency of this proposed step, but he was curbed by a characteristic antipathy to any slightest admission of being led. In his usual manner, in fact, he had impetuously decided that Riley’s place he would have, and he was sorely nudged to depart in-

stantly and come to terms with the obnoxious relative forthwith. For a time he restrained the inclination, to the obvious disturbance of his general temper. Restraint, however, was not possible for long. When it became too irksome to him, he summarily informed Clinkscapes, that it was time for him to go home, and that as it was a fine night he himself would accompany him some part of the way. Clinkscapes was shrewd enough to see through the device, and acquiesced in his principal's decision with little reluctance. When they were driving along the road, Wayfer informed his companion of their destination. The sun had not yet disappeared when they reached the farmhouse of Sandy Brook, the coveted residence of Ephraim Riley.

CHAPTER X.

PROSERPINE.

So Joice was once more left alone. She did not suspect her husband's object so readily as Clinkscales had done, for she knew of the depth of unfriendly feeling which existed between the two kinsmen, and thought that it would require a greater degree of persuasion or plausible argument before Michael could be got to give a thought to the project. The idea was not one which had suddenly occurred to Joice, nor was it indeed one of her own at all. It had been suggested to her by none other than Miss Sulby that very morning after church. The school-mistress had

had another visit from Mrs. Riley, when the latter had divulged the state of her family affairs, upon which occasion Ruth had given way to a little characteristic preaching on her own account, apparently not without some small result. Joice's suggestion to her husband was really the outcome of all these preceding circumstances.

The young wife, however, was not pondering these things as she still sat at the window where she had been all the evening. She had returned there from seeing the dog-cart drive away from the farm-yard, and she could see it mounting the green ridge which separated the house from the road. It was that which prompted her thoughts, and they were not bright ones. She thought that she too might have been in it, if she could have had her desire. Her husband had not asked her, and she shrank from risking another disappointment by asking for herself. Never-

theless, he would have to walk back when he left Clinkscapes, for the cart was the one in which the latter had come from Dormantley; and Joice, in her simplicity, thought that it would not have been unnatural for her to be there to walk back with her husband. She knew at any rate that she should have enjoyed it. Such small pleasures, however, were not for her, any more than were the larger ones; of that she was equally well aware.

She soon wearied of her thoughts, and resolved at least to rid herself temporarily of the sense of oppression which those desolate walls inspired. She would go into the fields.

The sun, though sinking, was still high above the west, shedding a golden light upon everything within its gaze,—even gilding the refined gold of the furze blossom upon the slope,—and throwing clear-cut shadows across the green sward of pasture

field and orchard. The sacred stillness of the evening hour was already upon the earth : the air was 'breathless with adoration.' Joice felt the influence of the surroundings without paying particular attention to the details. She wandered over the field where the cows were grazing, passing in amongst them without disturbing them at their feast. As her quiet step rustled through the grass, it mingled with the constant whish of tongues as they were curled about the blades ; and occasionally an animal would raise an intelligent face to regard the passer-by, renewing in a moment its occupation with a long drawn sigh and an impatient movement of the tail. The song of the lordly thrush, as he sang out his very heart from that topmost twig of the elm tree, was even audible to Joice ; but the chiff-chaffs, linnets, and other smaller birds were altogether unheeded. Her eyes were fixed

upon the ground, and for the first time it was noticeable how much older she was looking.

Her walk was not without some good effect upon her spirits, although she lost so much of her surroundings. She had picked a buttercup, it is true, from the masses of blossom which the cows refused, but it hung idly from her hand. Flowers received but little more notice than the birds. The influence she received was but a vague general one, such as we receive from the sun's light with our eyes shut : a sense that it is not actually dark.

From the fields Joice passed into a by-lane, used for little save agricultural purposes : only the wheel ruts and the horses' track were not green. It was bordered by a marshy strip of land producing rushes, tall reeds and grasses ; valerian, meadow-sweet, and other moisture-loving plants. Even this spot did not greatly arouse her. She walked on in the same listless way for

some distance, until at length she was effectually aroused by something. It was, however, nothing in the natural surroundings.

As Joice had walked she heard a sharp dog's bark, and a voice immediately thereafter calling her own name; she turned in the direction of the sound, but saw nothing. The call was repeated, with the additional words,

‘Here I am, behind the hedge.’

As Joice had already recognized from the voice, it was Ruth Sulby who was standing there. Her dog had already made his way through the thicket.

‘Are you alone?’ said the school-mistress. ‘Capital! You are just the one I wanted. You can help me to carry these flowers. Wait, I will come along to the gate: you walk on.’

When Ruth appeared at the gate, she was seen to have a basket as well as her hands overflowing with wild flowers. Even

Joice could not resist a laugh at her friend's appearance, so overladen was she with her burden.

'I am so glad you came this way,' said Miss Sulby when they were together. 'I was just thinking that I should be obliged to go home, and I have not got nearly as many as I want.'

'Whatever do you want them for?' was the other's surprised query.

'For the school,' said Ruth, as she was leaning to the ground to arrange a handful for Joice to take.

'It is not the school-feast, is it?'

'O no; we have flowers on other days as well as the school-feast. I never like the children to be without them.'

'What beautiful ones!' exclaimed Joice, taking a great bunch in both her hands. 'Where did you find them, Miss Sulby? They are quite like garden flowers.'

'Why, Joice, you have passed them all in this lane; but come along, I want to get

to the pond by the Meadow Farm, and the time is getting on. You are at liberty for half-an-hour, aren't you ?'

'Ye-es. My husband has gone on the Dormantley road, and will not be back yet, I expect. I should like to go with you.'

'Come, then ; let us walk briskly. We can talk as we go along.'

On they went, Ruth constantly stepping aside to make an addition to her store, and talking cheerfully to her companion all the time. Something seemed to have put the usually taciturn school-mistress into an especially gladsome mood, and she was evidently anxious to impart some of it to Joice. The world was to the latter no longer the vacant space which, but a few minutes before, it had been. Ruth pointed out everything ; not only did the flowers she gathered serve for her comments, but everything else about her. A distant hill in the amber haze beneath the sun ; a group of cattle, or a budding tree ; or again a

picturesque barn-roof whose golden lichen fairly glowed in the evening sun.

Then the birds did not escape her. She appeared to know the song of all ; for the attention of Joice was called to them individually by name. If it chanced to be a linnet that she heard, the school-mistress would stand, almost breathlessly, with hand raised to impose silence upon her companion, and listen with rapt attention to the rich and varied song, waiting for the rapid flow of the canary-like trill to glide into the plaintive, long-drawn notes which formed the culmination of the song, and its point of greatest charm to this individual listener.

It is not to be supposed that Joice could actually share in her companion's transcendental mood, but she could get simple pleasure from the sights pointed out to her, and they at least drew away her thoughts into quite a distinct channel. After going for the greater part of a mile

they arrived at their destination, and Ruth ran to look over a gate.

‘Yes,’ she cried, ‘they are out, so we have not come for nothing. Look, Joice!’

Just within the field was a small pond in the corner, round one side of which grew a mass of the yellow iris. From amongst the host of sword-like flags the fleurs-de-lis peeped out, and for them had Miss Sulby come. She was quickly by their side, and (not without some difficulty and danger of immersion) she gathered what she wanted: the two then were at liberty to return.

Joice agreed to accompany the school-mistress back again to the village, so as to assist in carrying the burden. They struck their path across the fields, engaged in conversation as before. The way did not seem long under such conditions, nevertheless when they reached the West Coppice the sun had sunk far towards the horizon. It had left the thrush upon the

elm-tree, and the rays crept slowly up the hill. Before crossing the stile at the entrance to the wood, Ruth stopped to bid her companion look westwards, and as she did so she passed some remark, scarcely intended for Joice, likening the prospect which they beheld to the threshold of some distant land of which both of them had read. Hardly had she finished it, when a dog bounded forward barking to their side, and was similarly greeted by Miss Sulby's Dash.

‘Why, Spot, how do you come here?’ said Joice, in surprise.

But there stood the answer, just beyond the stile: Michael Wayfer was walking towards them.

He greeted the school-mistress with civility and she him in return.

‘Michael, I thought you were on the Dormantley road,’ remarked his wife, with apparently a glad smile at the sight of him. ‘I meant to come that way to meet

you after going with Miss Sulby home.'

'No, I have been to Sandy Brook. I never said that I was going on the Dormantley road.'

This was not said in any ill-humour, for indeed the young farmer seemed to be in exceptional good-humour for him. It was really the first direct encounter he had had with Miss Sulby since his marriage, and another front might reasonably have been expected. He seemed, however, to harbour no resentment.

'Don't come any further, Joice,' said Ruth. 'I can manage——'

'O, yes, go on. I will come with you, if you don't mind.' Wayfer himself was the speaker.

'O, thank you, Michael,' interposed Joice, quickly, not giving the schoolmistress an opportunity to speak. 'It will be a beautiful walk back. You don't mind, Miss Sulby?'

'Certainly not.'

On the way Wayfer was talkative, and confided to his two companions the secret of his having taken in hand Riley's farm of Sandy Brook. It never occurred to him that the strict views of one of them would discountenance such proceedings on the Sabbath day : if it had done so, he would certainly have been more cautious in making his disclosure, for, as it chanced, he particularly wished at this moment to appear favourably in the eyes of the school-mistress. However, she passed no remark at all upon the matter which could show her attitude either way.

They were not long in reaching the school-house, and the sun had but just dipped behind the north-western hills when they arrived there. The load of flowers was deposited in the room ; thanks had been returned for the assistance ; and still Wayfer seemed disinclined to go. They were lingering in the school-yard when he said,

‘May I speak to you for a minute, Miss Sulby?’

‘By all means.’

Wayfer stepped aside for two or three yards, and the school-mistress went to him.

‘Rileys tell me that you have been helping them for some time, and—and—I expect you will be glad to hear that I have taken the farm and that they can still live there. But times are bad, and I have lost a lot of money. I could do far better if I had a bit more capital. I wanted to ask you if you would lend me the two hundred pounds for a short time, at proper interest, of course.’

‘I have not got it, Mr. Wayfer,’ was Ruth’s reply, given in a matter-of-fact tone. ‘I told Mrs. Riley that I should not keep it.’

Wayfer’s face showed his annoyance, and he turned away from the conversation. He and Joice bade their com-

panion good-night, and set off for their homeward walk. It was a disappointing walk after all Joice's expectations; the earth was again a void. As they crossed the fields the hills grew clearer in the west and the twilight came slowly around them. The wood was dusky as they passed through it, but when beyond its precincts the hills again appeared, now clear against the afterglow, with dark bars of restful clouds above them. The voice of the cuckoo echoed through the still coomb, and the partridges were calling through the meadows. From the level lands below came the restless notes of the pee-wits, and the grating voice of the corn-crake, mingling with the lonely distressful cries of lambs. The gloom was deepening when they reached the orchard, and the bats flitted silently about the trees, only to be perceived when they crossed a patch of sky which fell between the branches.

Nothing of this had Joice seen or heard.

As she crossed her own threshold, her eye caught sight of the evening star, and she was aware that her day of rest was over.

CHAPTER XI.

MORALITIES.

THOSE business transactions with Michael Wayfer only displayed one insignificant side of Gabriel Bewglass in his new life. Had one judged of his character from that alone, he would have been pronounced a precise, somewhat phlegmatic, man of few words, and wholly guiltless of anything like geniality. We have already seen enough of him to know that, unless his altered position had materially changed his disposition, such was not the man. Bewglass was not in reality much changed, not at least in radical disposition; if he still possessed a quality at all it was that of

geniality, or, in other words, of wide sympathy. Over this feeling, it is true, he had a husk of stern impulsiveness, tinged perhaps slightly with an affected cynicism ; but how shallow was this covering his conduct almost daily proved. The real man was only to be seen in his private relations: under the roof of that re-established cottage now once again warmer than before its recent state of ruin.

It will be seen, then, that Bewglass was the direct opposite of Michael Wayfer. Could their diverse natures have been fused into one individual, the result would undoubtedly have been a most useful and admirable member of society, in whatever station it had been his lot to have been cast. Bewglass wanted much of Wayfer's practical instinct ; and Wayfer wanted the leaven of some of his opponent's sentiment.

As we already know, this newly-appointed agent of Mr. Silverside had been trained for the legal profession, but from some

feeling of incompatibility with the pursuit he had ultimately abandoned it. That it was from no mere capricious motives, the sacrifice of his worldly prospects seemed to afford sufficient evidence. He had never spoken to anybody about the step except in the most general of terms. Between him and his father there had never been the closest spiritual intercourse, although the bond of personal affection between the two had been exceptionally strong. The clergyman had unbounded confidence in his son's wisdom and integrity, and being moreover fully cognisant of his own prudential shortcomings, (from the worldly point of view,) he never thought of questioning the rightness of Gabriel's conduct.

The young man had not been highly educated, according to the methods of the schools, but his learning was respectable. He had never reached a university. The education which really influenced his life

had been acquired, since his school days, from a course of wholly self-directed reading. Gabriel was by no means an extensive reader, nor had his mind been directed towards any one particular aim. In study, strictly so called, with a view to the acquirement of positive knowledge, he scarcely ever, save for professional purposes, indulged. Notwithstanding this want of conscious aim, a process went on within him by means of which all matter of a particular tendency was extracted from his reading for special appropriation; and this matter was of an ethical rather than a material or artistic nature, or at least was appropriated for the illustration of certain ethical notions pre-existing in the reader.

It may assist us in obtaining a better knowledge of this man if, before proceeding further, I mention some actual examples of his reading: it will be sufficient, for the purpose, to name two distinct species of works which, at the present time, found

peculiar acceptance with him. These were the works of Thomas Carlyle and the old traditionary ballads of the north. The latter were no recent favourites with him, having indeed retained their hold from boyhood. Although not rich in the *belles-lettres*, the small collection of books possessed by the old clergyman had included specimens of Scott, amongst them the volumes of Border Minstrelsy. These had, naturally enough, been well thumbed by the solitary boy in the remote and silent vicarage. Although caring little for vain pursuits, Gabriel's father had ever retained an ardent fondness for his native hills, and frequently spoke of them and their associations to his son. This fostered an instinct in the latter which was further fed and developed by the spirit of the ballads. Furthermore, upon two occasions in his boyhood, had Gabriel been taken to the north, and, although he had been there himself several times since, it was from

these two earliest visits that the land and its traditions took their especial flavour in his mind.

A knowledge of Thomas Carlyle was a very much later acquisition. To him Gabriel's attention had first been seriously called by a fellow-clerk in the government office, and an enthusiastic study of the rugged philosopher had been the result. Bewglass found something intensely congenial in his teaching, and under it the young man's mind appeared rapidly to develop. It served to concentrate his forces and to point out to them some distinctive line of march. The stern message of the old prophet fell here upon congenial soil. To such a depth was Gabriel stirred by it that, in the height of his zeal, he addressed a letter to Cheyne Row. To this the great man had deigned to reply, and two or three more letters had passed between them. Ultimately young Bewglass was invited to make a pilgrimage to

Chelsea, and for one whole hour-and-a-half had he looked upon that rugged visage there.

These events had taken place about twelve months before the opening of this narrative, and they had not failed to exercise a radical influence over Gabriel's life. He was now twenty-seven years of age, and thus outgrowing the period of boyhood; nevertheless, it was only since his establishment at Shipcombe that he had formed any definite object for his life. In the ultimate shaping of it Wayfer had served as no unimportant agent.

It was not, then, mere external circumstances that had put the land-agent and the tenant in opposition. It was simply instinct against instinct, strengthened upon one side by very distinctly recognized principles.

The other relationships of Bewglass in the village were for the most part extremely cordial. Mr. Silverside and his family

received him genially, the lady of the household perhaps with rather a too marked degree of scrupulous civility ; but in the vicar and his daughter there was no trace of their conduct being prompted by anything but genuine feeling. The young man was never by any of them allowed to feel that he was in any sense a dependent ; nevertheless, he himself was content to let his social intercourse with the family be confined to the occasions of dining with them by invitation ; opportunities, however, which were not unfrequently extended to him. To Mrs. Bewglass they were not the source of enjoyment which they undoubtedly were to her son, and on the plea of failing health in the lady, Gabriel was generally permitted to go alone.

The old lady found more congenial relaxation in the company of her humbler friend the school-mistress. It is not to be supposed that Gabriel got anything but pleasure, too, from his intercourse with

Miss Sulby ; but, upon a radical analysis of the respective impressions, it would have been found that an evening at the vicarage created incomparably the more sparkling sensation. Bewglass enjoyed well enough a half-serious discussion with the schoolmistress, for she was so desperately in earnest. In the intimacy to which they had very readily got, he called her, in the banter in which he indulged, the Puritan, or in another mood the Abbess : and Ruth never resented the appellations.

There was a pleasant intellectual homeliness in these evening colloquies by the hearth of Rose Cottage, which, however slight may have been the effect upon the young man of the party, exercised a deep influence over one of the others present. So far had Miss Sulby grown to build the sole delight of her life upon them that with characteristic scrupulousness she was beginning seriously to question the propriety of so far indulging herself. Self-indulgence

was to her one of the most deadly of sins. Nevertheless, the school-mistress had not yet begun to put into practical effect the misgivings of which she was occasionally conscious. She was still a frequent visitor at the house of Mrs. Bewglass.

There was, indeed, a reasonable excuse enough for the continuation of this familiar intercourse in the unsatisfactory state of health of the old lady. That threatened destruction of her home, following so soon upon her husband's death, had sadly shattered her, and there was little likelihood of her again being the strong woman which she had been hitherto. Nobody was such an acceptable companion to her as Ruth Sulby, a fact constantly referred to by the old lady herself; so that there seemed hardly cause for disquiet in any ordinary conscience. It did not satisfy the scruples of the young lady in question.

A few days after that Sunday evening last described, Ruth was to be found mak-

ing one of these customary visits. It was again evening, and when she reached the gate before the cottage she beheld Mrs. Bewglass and her son busy in the garden. At the sound of the gate the lady turned immediately and went forward to greet her friend. Gabriel did not look up from his employment. When they came up to where he was stooping, he just said,

‘O, is it you, Miss Sulby? I hope I see you well;’ and continued his planting work.

For a short time Mrs. Bewglass claimed Ruth’s assistance in the garden, but then, as the dew was pronounced to be falling heavily, the two ladies went into the house.

Bewglass continued his work until the sun had been gone for some time. Just as he was deciding to put away his implements, he heard soft footsteps upon the gravel path, and he walked across to the two figures.

‘You are not going, Miss Sulby?’ he said, sharply.

An affirmative reply was given.

‘O, no ; don’t go yet. I was just coming in to have an argument. It is early yet. I will see you safely home.’

There was a little parrying, before the easy surrender, and the three returned into the cottage.

When Gabriel had removed the evidences of his evening’s employment he came into the sitting-room. As he entered he was half chanting a stanza which was often on his lips :

‘O, well like I to ride in a mist,
And shoot in a northern win’ ;
And better far a lady to steal,
That’s come of a noble kin.’

‘You seem to have a great admiration for those uncivilized creatures, Gabriel,’ remarked his mother.

‘I have, mother ; I have much in common with them. The man that wrote those lines was an enviable creature. Don’t

you think so, Miss Sulby ?' he said, throwing himself into an easy-chair which was always left for him.

'No, I don't envy him, Mr. Bewglass. There is a bracing ring about the words certainly ; but I admire the spirit of them more at a distance than near at hand.'

'You are too tender,' was the reply. 'Mildness has lost its influence, if it ever had any. That robust northern spirit infused into modern philanthropists would do wonders.'

'That re-opens our old quarrel,' remarked Ruth.

'Well, now, take your friend Wayfer for an example. Can that fellow be humanized by gentle means ?'

'I believe that every human being can be.'

'I certainly do not. To be humanised that man Wayfer must be broken, he can't be bent. I don't believe that sentiment would ever have any effect upon

him. He is the very incarnation of an infernal spirit, not uncommon in these days,—business personified. Do you mean to say that you can deal with that spirit sentimentally? Nothing but a sledge-hammer.'

'But surely a business spirit is necessary in the world?'

'Yes, it is; but it must be tempered with something human. The business instinct, pure and simple, inevitably makes its subject a scoundrel; and surely such must be removed. Kimble is a business man,—I never knew a keener,—but he is not a scoundrel. The instinct is disciplined by human feeling in him, as it must be if it is to be tolerated at all. I contend that if you meet with a man without this human element, if it is within your power, it is your duty to crush him, just as you would a viper, for the good of mankind at large. Such is Mr. Michael Wayfer.'

'I cannot agree to it. Your language

is only applicable to criminals, and with them I think more good could be done if gentler means were used.'

'Applicable to criminals! Are not unprincipled business men the worst of criminals because the most contemptible? They are the incarnation of self, which generally speaking is the devil, so far as it relates, at any rate, to the rest of the world.'

'But, Mr. Bewglass, you would not crush anybody before making an effort to humanise him by gentler means? That would show a spirit too much like the one which you condemn.'

'Stuff and nonsense! I crush nobody for my own pecuniary benefit, which it is the daily aim of these scoundrels to do. It is simply a universal duty to destroy vermin. As to the first part of your remark, I deny altogether the efficacy of gentle means. They have been proved futile.'

‘Then you re-introduce the methods of the middle ages and the Inquisition?’

‘Under better lights; yes.’

‘I have done.’

Gabriel burst into a merry laugh, in which all present joined.

‘I am glad you have capitulated. Now I will admit how far I, too, will relent. Save in these hopeless cases, such as Wayfer’s, I agree with you that something may be done otherwise than by aggression. The evil of the day is, of course, well enough known: to wit, want of geniality, or personal sympathy, between the various classes of the people. Gentle means will remedy that, and only gentle means. That is the social question, and is wider and deeper than the mere business one which is but a part of it. Remedy the root, and the health will extend to all the branches; but, until the root is remedied, oughtn’t you to cut off any of the evil branches or twigs if you get the chance? The regeneration of

the rotten root is within the power of the cultivated people, it could be begun to-morrow and be effected in the course of a generation ; but it will not be begun to-morrow, and will not be accomplished in a good many generations. You know the remedy, and we have talked of it before. It is as old as the hills. Let every cultivated person, howsoever rich he or she be, deal humanly, genially, fraternally, with every uncultivated person within reach, and the reformation is completed. There is only one hindrance to this pretty little scheme, and that is the infusing the geniality into the cultivated persons. Of course, I use the word cultivated very loosely, meaning simply cultivation in the world's eyes. Cultivated people, strictly so-called, have the quality of which I speak without our infusing it. Do you agree to all this ?

‘ I think I do.’

‘ I know the reason of that guarded answer ; you think I do not obtrude

enough the element of religion. As such I do not : but the spirit of my remarks is the essential spirit of the Christian religion, and I think that now-a-days it will carry more weight if presented in this abstract way. Teach the rich people their religion, but not the poor. If the rich people had a religion, the result of it would be quite sufficient teaching for the poor. They would find *their* religion without being directly taught it.'

'I certainly do agree to that,' remarked Miss Sulby.

'Mind, I do not condemn your formalism : far from it. I think it necessary for working the desired influence at present ; but I would supplement it by more secular means. I think my own father an excellent example of the necessity of this. I defy a more admirable sample of a parish priest to be produced by the universe ; and yet I maintain that if he had had more mere secular human qualifications he would

have effected just twice the amount of good in this parish. It is necessary now-a-days to gild your pill, and to do it so thoroughly that the pill is even of irrecognizable shape. Now, Miss Sulby, what was your object in adorning your school-room with all those flowers last Monday morning? You didn't know I saw you.'

'To awaken the children,' was the reply, not without a suspicion of a blush upon the face of the speaker. 'I always have some flowers in the summer,—only wild ones.'

'Only wild ones,—why only wild ones, pray?'

'Really, Gabriel, you are quite rude,' expostulated the old lady, as she raised her eyes from her knitting.

'Miss Sulby understands me, mother. We have got beyond bandying civilities, thank goodness.'

Ruth laughed as she gave her answer.

'I suppose I must answer, although I do

not like talking about my own motives. I have wild ones because I want to teach the children to look at wild things. I want to foster in them some tiny bit of the spirit of their surroundings, so that if possible one or two of them may grow up with a different interest in the fields from that felt by the cows or sheep. You will think me fantastic.'

'I? You know better than that. It is an admirable idea, and a practical bit of my own general one. I envy you your work, I assure you. The only discouraging part of it is that it must be such arid soil for implanting any abstract sentiment upon. The reception of such, I fear, requires a degree of preliminary culture such as rustic folk can hardly claim. Don't you find it a hopeless undertaking?'

'Certainly I do not find them a race of artists or philosophers; but it is by no means hopeless. I ought to tell you that my remarks are made in a semi-religious

manner which probably you would disapprove.'

'Not at all. It is the only possible way in which you can make your instruction have any appearance of the concrete. It was forgetting that that made me think it hopeless. You cannot touch them any other way.'

'So I thought; but I should not wish to touch them any other way.'

'Certainly not with children; but suppose you had their parents to deal with?'

'It would not make any difference, except in the manner of doing it.'

'In that I doubt whether you would succeed so well. I hope you do not mistake me. It is not the religion I question, but the minds of those you treat. Ordinary people—yes, even country folk—are either wholly indifferent to religion or very definitely antagonistic to it: neither of these would you influence save by superhuman exertion. Not a human being lives who

is either indifferent or antagonistic to what I call genial human treatment apart from all direct consideration of religion. The majority of poor people abominate the average religious visitor, the men of course more especially, or at least quiz and sneer at her when she is gone : but for a simply genial soul they can feel a very genuine liking. I speak from practical experience, as you are well aware.'

'There is something in what you say, Mr. Bewglass; but it is not the fault of the religion.'

'No; that of course is true. It is simply the result of the gross way in which that religion has for so long been embodied, or more properly disembodied; and I contend it is sufficient warrant for the abandonment altogether of the directly religious aspect. You might as well go to appease a bull with a red rag in your hand, as to regenerate the modern poor with texts upon your lips. You, Miss Sulby, I own are one

amongst five hundred. Your tact will never fail. But let us talk of average members of society.'

'Well, come, Gabriel, and have some supper, or Ruth will never get home to-night,' said Mrs. Bewglass from the table. 'I am sure you have talked enough for once.'

'Mother, you are always a bad listener. I'll be bound Miss Sulby would continue the discussion until mid-night with great pleasure.'

He took his chair at the table.

'I am not tired of it yet, at any rate,' laughed she.

'In all seriousness,' Gabriel again began, 'there is no hope save in the establishment of a personal footing between people of a different class. Call it democracy, if you like; I don't. It is only the true aristocracy. I don't ask anyone to bring his ploughman into his drawing-room, or to demolish his drawing-room to give his ploughman an acre. All that will right

itself. All I demand is that the man who possesses a drawing-room shall be a fellow to his ploughman in all intercourse they may have. Let the ploughman feel that a drawing-room means something, and that the owner of it is a man to whom he may speak in adversity other than in a whining tone of beggary. We all live now at swords drawn.'

'That is too true; but I am afraid, Mr. Bewglass, that you credit the average possessor of a drawing-room with too much lofty feeling if you think them capable of this.'

'I don't think them capable of it, that is the difficulty I have already mentioned. It has been the difficulty for ages. If all were, the thing would be done; but all might be. There must be many, in fact, who have the requisite true feeling, but who never act upon it either out of laziness, indifference, thoughtlessness, or the like. If even they would bestir themselves.

Everything must have a beginning; like your wild-flower influences. A thing like that, widespread and in competent hands, might have gigantic results in a generation. It is the embryo of enormous possibilities. Present efforts confine themselves to prizes at flower-shows,—altogether useless. But then we want a thousand or two Ruth Sulbys to take the matter in hand. One can picture the pitiful attempts that would ensue upon general directions to village school-mistresses to instil into the children a love of wild-flowers.'

The young man burst into a loud species of laughter not uncommon with him.

'Well, Miss Sulby, don't let us disturb our sleep to-night,' he said immediately. 'We shan't mend the world from Shipcombe.'

The topic of conversation was changed and the voice of Mrs. Bewglass was more frequently heard.

According to promise Gabriel accom-

panied Miss Sulby through the dark to her solitary dwelling. It was by no means the first time that he had done so, but for some reason the young lady to-night felt a particular uneasiness in his company. His conversation upon the road need hardly have discomposed her, for it was matter-of-fact enough. Even the discussion of the evening was not renewed.

It was not until they were by the vicarage-gate that they had any definite topic. At that point Bewglass started one: one upon which he had consulted his present companion before.

‘They are delightful people at the vicarage. I like them better every time I go. Do you see much of Miss Silver-side?’

‘O, yes; she often comes to the school, and is very pleasant.’

‘I should think that she can give you useful hints in your æsthetic work. She has admirable taste, and is about the most

refined woman I know : so different from the ordinary girl in her class of life. None of that nauseating self-satisfied vacuity which you expect from a young woman who has nothing to do in the world.'

'I like her very much.'

'We must discuss with her your idea of the wild-flowers ; with her help I believe much might be made of it. Now, she has the genial instinct, if you like, in a remarkable degree. Giles Radway's opinion is conclusive, and, poor old man, he is enthusiastic about her. It really was admirable of her to attend those singing classes of his ; it redoubled their influence.'

They had reached the school-gateway, but Gabriel did not seem inclined to bring his remarks to an end. He kept on talking for some minutes as they stood by the gate.

'Miss Silverside might do very much for this rural population ; will do, I be-

lieve. She has the right feeling, and she has the tact and accomplishments to direct it. She often talks of such matters with enthusiasm. She is too diffident; but that is only testimony to her nobility. That will be remedied in time. O, what might be done in a little village like this! It is not like a town. It requires a herculean spirit to grapple with a town; but a district like this is compassable. Dorothy Silverside will do it; mark my word, Miss Sulby. But I shall stay here all night. Come down again soon. Good-night.'

Gabriel took the hand extended to him, and Ruth went into the house.

Bewglass set off merrily on his way homewards. As was his wont in such a cheerful mood, he hummed a spirited Scottish air to keep time with his own glad heart. Had it been daylight, or any reasonable hour, he would have sung it outright. The words were running through his mind:

‘ Will ye go lassie, go,
To the braes of Balquhither,
Where the blaeberries grow
’Mang the bonnie bloomin’ heather ?’

He was on the opposite side of the road to the vicarage, but when even with the house he stopped, both his song and his step. There was a light in an upper window, and upon this he fixed his gaze. As he watched, a shadow flitted across the blind. Perhaps it was a sigh he heaved from his deep breast ; at any rate, he murmured,

‘ With you, Dorothy, very much would be possible. But courage ! “ Will ye go ? ” ’
etc.

Humming and footstep alike recommenced.

The school-mistress, having put a light to her lamp, was also ruminating ; but not in a songful mood. She had her dog (great favour !) in her lap, and to him she addressed the conclusion of her thoughts :

‘It is quite right, old Dash, isn’t it? We must work, work, and forget it. But oh, doggie, it is hard to bear!’

She kissed the sympathetic brow of the animal, and then rose from her chair. When she had got a book from the second shelf of her book-case, she took her seat again. Very soon she retired to rest.

CHAPTER XII.

STRAW.

WAYFER had looked upon that two hundred pounds as a certainty. It was not that he was in positive present need of it, but no sooner had Mrs. Riley informed him of its return to the school-mistress than he resolved that it would be a very convenient small addition to his capital, by no means to be despised. Knowing Miss Sulby's nature better, as he now did, he foresaw no difficulty whatever in getting possession of the money. Doubtless, if the sum had still been in the school-mistress' hands, his expectations would have been easily realised; for the money

had, from the outset, been a source of intense annoyance to the original legatee. However, it had been temporarily disposed of, in a manner with which we are already acquainted. For the sake of Wayfer's peace of mind, it was perhaps as well that he was not aware of the present investment of it. The disappointment had not much affected him after the first momentary annoyance.

He was not long in finding out the wisdom of the step to which Clinkscapes had urged him. The small holding of Sandy Brook was indeed admirably adapted to the requirements of Wayfer's new system of farming. No doubt in the hands of a more calmly judicious business man that farm and the one of Sedgcomb could have been worked with excellent effect for the success of such a scheme as Wayfer had in mind. The principal necessity would have been that he should go to the handling of them in an entirely unprejudiced spirit.

This, we already sufficiently know, was by no means Wayfer's attitude. Putting aside his personal antipathy to the agent with whom he had to deal, which was quite an adventitious attribute of the situation, there was the other more radical one which would for ever prevent him from engaging rationally in the scheme which he had before him. It was a principle firmly rooted in his mind that the interests of a landlord and a tenant must of necessity be antagonistic.

Wayfer was by no means singular in his supposition. Agrarian discontent is not confined to any one portion of the British Islands, any more than the causes of discontent are confined to one side of the disagreeing parties. There are many hundreds of slumbering Wayfers amongst the farming brotherhood, who with oaths attribute their unprofitable existence to the exactions (not pecuniary merely) of their landlords. They cannot do what they

like with the land which they must make pay. The superior, so they think, sits in a well-lined easy chair, and dictates to them from that position how their land is to be cultivated; regardless altogether of practical financial considerations. Customs which had their rise in a very different state of circumstances are sustained at a time when they mean little short of ruin to the cultivator of the soil.

Nobody was more imbued with this particular form of discontent than was the tenant of Sedgecomb. He considered that the success of his small venture placed the matter upon strong ground, and it added somewhat to his inclination to pugnacity. If Sedgecomb were just such a broken-up farm as this small one of Sandy Brook, upon which the tenant was allowed to do whatever he pleased in anything like reason, he foresaw for himself a very extensive fortune. Instead of profitless acres of wheat and other cereals, of which he

might not even sell the straw, (the only possible means, he averred, of saving himself from actual loss,) acres of fruit trees under the shade of which cattle might pasture, or geese, turkeys, poultry and all edible fowls under heaven might find a run ; or acres of garden produce ; or even acres of honest pasture which might at least be turned to some profitable account in the way of dairying and such like. It was with bitterness that he thought of the suave shelving of his propositions in the first place by the clerical landlord in person, and then, since, of the decided negative from the obnoxious agent.

There was nothing remarkable in such a disposition as that of Michael Wayfer brooding inordinately over these thwarting circumstances. There seemed a simple remedy in abandonment of the unsuitable premises for others better adapted to his particular requirements ; but from this he was effectually restrained by the prospect

of serious loss in the realisation of his expended capital. He was already beginning to find himself quite sufficiently involved. Moreover there entered into the tenancy of the farm of Sedgecomb just that element of personal opposition which exercises a most stimulating almost fascinating effect on one like Wayfer. Combined with his cold business qualifications, he had a strong spice of the British attribute of rebelliousness against anything savouring of injustice, particularly in semi-public affairs. He would not voluntarily have made the smallest sacrifice in the cause of principle ; but if driven to it by personal considerations he was doubtless quite capable of flying vigorously at any throat which appeared in opposition to him.

During the summer months Wayfer weighed these things. They could not be long absent from his mind when the insufficient keep and housing of his increasing stock of cattle was daily before his

eyes. He talked and grumbled to his henchman Clinkscapes, with but little profitable suggestion, however, from that quarter. Christopher could only propose a change of holding, and this he now learned to forbear mentioning.

Nothing of any importance occurred before the getting in of the harvest. It chanced to be a very abundant one, early in the decade, and Wayfer might have been expected to have appeared in reasonable spirits about it. This was not altogether the case. It was not the species of advantage upon which he had set his heart, therefore it brought little satisfaction to him. He in fact declared to Clinkscapes that the landlords reaped the benefit and not the raisers of the crops. Christopher, thinking that the assertion was a device wherewith to cheat him of a bonus, requested an explanation: he received only a peremptory re-assertion.

Whilst some of the shocks of grain upon

the higher lands still stood in the September sun, the fluctuating buzz of the machine, which now takes the place of the rhythmic flail, was heard from the rick-yard of Sedgcomb. The rats had scarce had time to establish themselves in their winter quarters, before they were ruthlessly driven out into the jaws of expectant terriers. The bags were arranged in the granary ready for market, and the straw stood stacked in the yard.

A few days after this, when the month of September was but just out, Wayfer's chief carter, our acquaintance Stephen Oates, was to be seen issuing from that very rick-yard with a waggon groaning under a heavy load of straw. Bright golden straw it was, which glistened in the morning sun, representing aptly in itself the golden locks of autumn. As the cart approached the slight incline, Oates was at the head of the first of the three horses, and the boy at that of the third in the shafts,

when with a crack of the whip and with some words of encouragement in the peculiar language of the carter's mystery, the animals braced themselves nobly to encounter the ascent. The steps become short and quick, and the hoof points are firmly planted in the earth; see from the nostrils and the determined eye of that foremost animal what resolution is in him; the brown skin of the haunches is furrowed with the effort, the links of the chain partly revolve with the tension, fragments of turf are flung from those fiery hoofs, stones crushed under the heavy wheels, and then the summit is attained.

The breeze rustled among the loose ends of straw as the waggon proceeded. When they had reached the road the occasional sound of a sweep under an overhanging tree was added, and fragments of straw were left dangling from the twigs in exchange for the coloured leaves which had

been rudely taken. The carter and his boy went along doggedly enough, neither exchanging word with the other nor regarding anything save their horses from time to time. Before they had gone far, the attention, at least of one of them, was drawn to somebody on the road. It was Mr. Gabriel Bewglass who was walking leisurely in their direction. He seemed to scan closely the burden which he was approaching, and then the man under whose charge it was. When he reached him he exchanged a few words with Stephen Oates.

‘Is this from Sedgecomb?’ he asked.

‘’Eess, sir, ’t be.’

‘Where are you taking it to?’

‘To Sandy Bruck, sir. Them be my directions.’

‘All right.’

Bewglass went on his way and Stephen continued on his. The latter looked after

the retreating figure for a minute or two, and then said to his companion the boy,

‘Ye ’a’nt heard the last o’ that, Jack.’

After that the two relapsed into silence as before.

Gabriel turned off the road at the gate which led across to Wayfer’s farm. This had not been his original destination, but something led him to call there as he passed. He found Michael in the rick-yard. Bewglass bade him good-morning, and received a mumbled greeting in return. The farmer could not see the object of pretending civility when something very different was intended. Probably he was in the right.

‘You know what I have come about, I expect. I met a load of straw on the road. Is it from here?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, you know it will have to come back. What is the good of carting it about the country.’

‘It’s going down to my other place. I have more here than I want, and I haven’t enough down there.’

‘Now, Wayfer, what is the good of seeking a quarrel like this? You know we shall not allow it.’

‘What is the good of having more stuff here than I can use?’

‘You know the law. You have to use here all the stuff on the place, however much it may be.’

‘That’s worn out,’ replied Wayfer. ‘There was a case down Gloucester way last week which proved that. I have as much here as ever the land ’ull take, and I can do what I like with the rest.’

‘That’s not so. You can only do it by special agreement, and your agreement does not provide for it. On this farm you will have to consume all straw and hay that you produce. We’ll not have a ton removed. If you remove it, it is at your own risk, so I give you fair warning.’

‘In that case at Gloucester they said it was an unreasonable custom, and the tenant won.’

‘Yes, he did; but he proved a special agreement, as I tell you.’

‘Well, I’ve moved the straw, and I am going to move some more, agreement or no agreement. We can’t live with your laws and your customs, and we’ll see who’s in the right.’

‘It’s useless talking in that way; but, if you won’t listen to reason, I’ll bid you good-day.’

The two thereupon separated.

When Bewglass was again in the village he took the trouble to hold a consultation with his principal. They were for a long time closeted in the library. Let us overhear part of their conversation.

‘Of course, it is the custom of the country,’ the clergyman was saying; ‘but it is becoming rather a hard one, and in a

great measure an unnecessary one nowadays.'

'In many cases it is; but I assure you, Mr. Silverside, that any relaxation of it in the case of Wayfer individually will mean the utter destruction of his farm; one of the best in the countryside. That retail undertaking has turned his head, and he will not be content until he has turned the place into a market-garden or worse. He must not do it there. He does not intend to make up the difference with any advanced manure; I am quite certain of that. He has simply got hold of some pernicious ideas which must be crushed at all hazards.'

'But it is no use our raising up a lot of odium by taking proceedings. Let us just warn the man, and look over it this time. I expect he is right about the quantity. It is an abundant year.'

'Warn him! But he defies us. He proclaims his intention of removing more.'

It is absolutely necessary to grapple with this man forthwith. Nothing short of damages and an injunction will restrain him.'

'Scarcely that, if he is such as you describe him,' observed the vicar, with a smile.

'Possibly not; but leniency will only lead to the utmost confusion.'

'Well, Mr. Bewglass, let us compromise it by putting it in Kidland's hands with elastic instructions. If he find Wayfer intractable, then certainly some steps must be taken to prevent mischief.'

With this Gabriel was satisfied, and the interview soon after was brought to an end.

In the course of a few days, accordingly, the tenant of Sedgcomb not unexpectedly received a lawyer's letter. The terrors which lay concealed under the polite words in which it was couched did not dismay him, but rather stirred up the very depths

of the stubbornness which lay within his nature. He consulted his own legal adviser upon it, and, although receiving but discouraging opinions from him, the farmer insisted upon a defensive attitude rather than the capitulation which was recommended.

There was but one termination, then, to the disagreement, and it was not long in coming. Towards the end of that same week some excitement was raised in the village of Shipcombe when it was known that the bum-bailiff of the county-court had served process upon 'young Wayfer,' as Michael was invariably called amongst his neighbours. The cause of it was already known, and factions had been formed for some days on behalf of plaintiff and defendant amongst the inhabitants who took interest in the matter—and, as may be imagined, the number who did not were few. Only Wayfer himself saw the actual writ of summons, and thus he only knew

the actual terms of the claim. It was to the effect that the plaintiff claimed fifty pounds damages, sustained through the defendant removing so many tons of straw from the land in his occupation, contrary to the custom of the country; and furthermore that the plaintiff applied for an injunction to restrain the defendant from removing other produce off the farm. Wayfer simply put it in the hands of his solicitor with peremptory instructions to defend, and then awaited the day of trial.

CHAPTER XIII.

ORATORY.

IT chanced that more than a month had to elapse before His Honour the County Court Judge for the Circuit No. — took his peregrinations in the direction of Dormantley. In that time much discussion had arisen in the district amongst tenant-farmers over the merits of the prospective case. Every market day, both in the market-place and at the various ordinaries patronised by the agriculturalists, animated debates took place, and opinions were unreservedly enunciated. It may be mentioned that the majority of such opinions were strongly in favour of the defend-

ant in the suit. Wayfer, from having been somewhat looked down upon by his agricultural brethren, suddenly found himself raised into a popular hero amongst them. 'Stick to it, Wayfer,' was the cry upon all hands, with the result of determining Wayfer to stick to it very resolutely accordingly. He seemed to have gained a new spirit by his sudden exaltation to fame.

At length the day arrived, and with it the county-court judge. It was market-day, and the court was accordingly crowded by numbers of farmers interested in the decision. The solicitors upon both sides had thought it wise to engage counsel in the case—a course which seems to be considered as an infallible sign, in a county-court, that exceptional importance is attached to the case under consideration. It could hardly now be on account of unusual complications in the legal technicalities involved, for the question at issue seemed an exceptionally simple one. Way-

fer could either be justified in his conduct or he could not. If the law were worth anything, surely it had a direct answer to that.

It seemed probable that the solicitors were influenced by the adventitious importance which the case had assumed amongst a large number of their own clients; and they were well aware that more importance would be attached by the public to the decision, if obtained upon the argument of lawyers but seldom seen amongst them, and who, moreover, were assisted to a position of peculiar dignity by the imposing addition of wig and gown. These things are worthy of consideration in a country district. In addition to full-fledged counsel, a jury had been impanelled to decide the questions, (and they seemed to be very fully impressed with the dignity of their position,) so that the usually disparaged county-court offered much of the appearance of a superior assize.

We will not follow the trial through all its minutiae. It lasted for about three hours what with opening speech, examination, cross-examination, rejoinder, summing-up, and the rest. Land agents, auctioneers and farmers of experience and repute in the district were produced for the plaintiff, as were others for the defendant. Expressions of opinion occasionally escaped the interested public, but were very promptly silenced by the authorities. It was, however, when the decision of the jury was announced that the unmistakable ebullition of feeling took place. As the newspaper report put it afterwards in their notice of the proceedings, 'Loud and long continued groans followed the verdict of the jury, and some minutes elapsed before his honour could proceed.'

It may, then, be readily surmised to what effect was this verdict. According to popular opinion, a court of justice had

once more been used as a means of emphasizing a profound injustice. Michael Wayfer, the martyr tenant farmer, had lost, and was mulcted accordingly in damages and costs.

The defeat, nevertheless, was in no way ignominious. After the decision had been given and the groans had died away, there was a stampede from the court-house of quite a triumphal nature. After such a long confinement in the close atmosphere of a court there was a general readiness to dine. The multitude, therefore, of Wayfer's supporters moved in the direction of the 'Plough Hotel,' that being the hostelry which received the patronage of the majority of them. Wayfer himself was prominent amongst the number.

The long dining-table was found to be in readiness, and the guests were not long in arranging themselves around it. There was some little discussion upon the matter

of a chairman. Wayfer was of course proposed, but he persisted in declining the honour. It was ultimately awarded to somebody, and Wayfer was installed in the vice-chair at the other end of the table. Then began a determined onslaught.

Enthusiasm in an unsuccessful cause did not apparently interfere with a proper development of appetite. For a time conversation was drowned in a clatter of knives and forks.

As the meal progressed, the tongues again began to triumph. There was but little method in the conversation: the company, although conscious of something within them which prompted them to grumble, had scarce the power of pronouncing articulately any actual demands. There was none of the bloodthirsty animosity noticeable either in their words or faces such as we are given to understand would have enlivened a similar gathering of Irish tenants upon such an occasion. No suggested boy-

cotting, shooting, or even withholding of rents. It was an inarticulate grumbling, pure and simple.

When the proper stage was reached in the proceedings, the chairman rose at the head of the table and was greeted with applause. He was a thick-set man of middle age, with anything but an intellectual countenance. He represented an old and respectable farming stock in the district, but was now generally reputed to be not quite so flourishing as some of his neighbours. Possibly his troubles, if he had any, were not the result of faults in himself so much as of misfortune in being born at an unseasonable time. He was at any rate well-known in the district as an uncompromising opponent of all modern so-called improvements in agricultural pursuits.

All faces turned towards him as he rose from his chair, and all tongues, after the first outburst, ceased.

‘Now, friends,’ he began, without any appearance of self-consciousness either in tone or mien; ‘you know as I’m no speaker. If you wanted one as was, you ought to have put somebody else in this chair. But, as I have to propose the health of our friend Michael Wayfer, I suppose you will expect me to say something in a plain way. None of you have taken more interest in the case which has been decided to-day than I have,’ [cries of ‘hear, hear!’] ‘and nobody feels more obliged to Wayfer for having brought it forward. It’s the only way of getting any notice to be given to our grievances. They talk a deal about Ireland, but it’s my belief as they be a good deal better off in Ireland than we are in Gloucestershire.’ [Cries of ‘That’s true, Mr. Chairman,’ and uproar.] ‘If a dog don’t be for ever barking in the gate some people seems to think as he have nothing to bark about; but that be all a mistake. I don’t know what farming be a-getting

to. If my father could come back to this country-side for a day or two he wouldn't know where he was, and he wouldn't know how to farm the land no better than a crow-boy; and yet, as many of you know, he was as good a farmer as there was i' the county. I am not one to say as our difficulties are caused by the landlords: that's all humbug. But what I do say is that the landlords will have to give us easier agreements.' [Thunders of applause.] 'The times be all wrong together, and, if we can't go on as we used to go on, no more can the landlords go on as they used to go on. They'll have to change as we 've had to. This selling o' the hay and straw is one of the principal things to be changed. But I have said enough, and now I'll propose the health o' Mr. Michael Wayfer, and leave any of you to talk as wants to.'

The toast was, of course, drunk uproariously, and Wayfer rose to respond with a resolute countenance.

‘Friends,’ he said, ‘Mr. Barker said that he was no speaker, but if he’s no speaker I don’t know what I am. I thank you for drinking my health, and for what you have said about me. If I’ve done any good to farmers by bringing up this quarrel about the straw, I am very glad I did it. I am not like Mr. Barker in my thoughts about the landlords. I think that the greater part of our difficulties are caused by them. At any rate, I know that mine are. If we don’t stick up for ourselves publicly, we shall not be able to live at all. At their agricultural shows and dinners, and such like, they make long speeches and talk a lot about their anxiety for the farmers, but they are only anxious that they won’t be able to pay their rents. If it comes to helping the farmers to make the rent by new buildings, or setting out land differently, they’re all anxious the other way.’ [A cry, ‘Not all of ’em.’] ‘I am glad somebody is different. I wish I was under him.

I've not much to say, for I can do things better than I can talk them. Before I sit down, though, I should like to say that now this attention has been given to our difficulties, I hope we shan't let it drop through without making something of it. Anybody will always find me ready to do anything I can to help the farmers against the landlords.'

Applause followed, although there were also several expressions of disapproval of anything like hostilities. The majority present, although grumblers, were in action constitutionally pacific, possibly more from an inherent indolence of spirit than from any benevolence of disposition. A speaker followed who positively ventured to condemn the over-aggressive tone of Wayfer ; nevertheless, to show his approval of the discontent, if reasonably indulged in and confined to practicable proportions, he proposed that the defendant in the recent action should be indemnified from loss by

means of a subscription to be raised amongst his interested neighbours, beginning with those present at that table. The proposition was agreed to, although with no marked enthusiasm, and nearly half of the required sum was raised there and then. Wayfer's spirits, which had not been low before, were by this raised to an unprecedented height.

It was perhaps only a coincidence that, after the practical adoption of this proposal, the zeal of the general company began noticeably to decline. The dinner was well over, and nobody seemed prepared to expound any particularly new ideas, so that it was natural enough for those present to meditate a dispersal. Most of them had still a little business to do in the town and days were short. As the casual conversation was continued amongst a few particularly zealous ones, one after another of the chairs became empty, until but a handful of the original assembly remained.

This remnant at last, too, broke up, and there was silence in the dining-room of the 'Plough Hotel.'

It will be seen that Wayfer and his friends were not specimens of a particularly lofty type of agriculturists. A great space lay, for instance, between them and our friend, Mr. John Kimble of Shipcombe; nevertheless, they were for the most part honest, hard-working farmers, who felt very practically the inconveniences of depressed times, and such men as exist in numbers in any general agricultural district. Their opinions are not generally heard in council, like those of their large capitalist brethren of the north and elsewhere; still, if only from their numbers, their opinions could not help but be of importance in the consideration of any wide, agricultural question.

Wayfer strode, elate, from the inn doorway in the direction of his shop in the High Street. In his present mood he was

rather inclined to look down upon his friend Clinkscapes, nevertheless he was about the only man to whom he was able to speak his mind unreservedly, and furthermore he had a genuine appreciation at bottom of the useful tact which was an undoubted attribute of his henchman. There was much time yet during which Clinkscapes must be useful to him. In addition to the exhilaration arising from his unexpected popular triumph, Wayfer also had cause for much in the thought of his business premises. It was market-day, and, when he went to the court in the morning, he had left Clinkscapes radiant behind the counter in the full expectation of a very busy day. Perhaps Christopher was additionally cheerful because of the prospect of some hours' freedom from the stern supervision of his matter-of-fact helpmeet. Mrs. Clinkscapes had been dispatched to another market on business, and such occasions were red-letter days in

the calendar of her husband. He liked to figure alone in the establishment of his creation (for such he ever accounted this enterprise of Wayfer's); he assumed an attitude of ludicrous importance before any customer for whom he thought it requisite, and entered into disquisitions upon the merits of his wares. He had developed into a zealous expounder of the value of dairy produce from a hygienic point of view. All these tendencies in him his wife authoritatively repressed.

The High Street was all activity as Wayfer passed along it. He kept his eyes fixed steadily before him so as to catch sight of his premises at the earliest moment possible. When he had at last done so he was rather disappointed at not seeing a block upon the pavement before those windows. The pathway at that point happened to be exceptionally free. When within but a few yards of the place, he saw two girls come out of the doorway; that, at

any rate, was better than nobody. Being customers of his own he naturally viewed them with interest. Just beside him they stopped on the pavement and one of them opened her hand. His eye was upon them.

‘See, Jane, he has given me some gold. That’s half-a-sovereign, and half-a-crown, and a shilling. I only gave him half-a-crown. We’ll divide it,’ she added, with a sly look at her companion.

‘You won’t,’ cried Wayfer, laying his hand upon her shoulder. ‘Come back to the shop with me.’

‘O, please, sir, I didn’t mean it,’ &c., &c.

The young farmer did not even glance at his tempting windows as he strode into the place with the two girls. The china cow, which presided over one side, surrounded by dishes of delicious-looking butter, cream-cheeses, eggs, and the rest, had no charm for him; neither had the bacon, ham, cheeses, &c., in the other

window, nor the poultry, pigeons, partridges, and so forth suspended outside. His face bore no pleasant expression.

No sooner had he entered the shop than the explanation flashed upon him. Clink-scales rose from a chair behind the counter, but immediately fell back into it again. His face bespoke his condition, and muttering came from his lips. For a moment Wayfer stood motionless; the colour actually left his face.

‘Give me that money,’ he said at last to the girl. ‘How much change do you want?’

She handed it to him and told him the correct amount.

‘Change — change?’ muttered Clink-scales, having once more raised himself from his chair. ‘Don’t—give any change here,’ he continued, with the usual garbled utterance of one in his condition.

Wayfer went round to the till and

opened it. As he handled the money the drunken man tottered forward with signs of protestation.

‘Till—robbery.’

He then fell against his principal. The farmer seized him instantly by the shoulder and flung him away with his full strength.

‘Get off, you brute,’ were his only words. Clinkscapes fell a heap at the furthest extremity of the shop.

The terrified children were glad to escape so easily. When they had left, Wayfer closed the shop-door and turned the key; he then walked to where his manager lay. The man was groaning, but scarcely moved. Michael seemed to have no thought whatever of the possible injury he might have inflicted; he seized Clinkscapes again by the coat and dragged him through a doorway at the back of the shop down two steps into a small sitting-room. When there, he lifted the man

into a chair and examined him. He was able to satisfy himself that there was at any rate no apparent damage; so he placed him again on the floor. Wayfer then himself sat down to consider the situation. It was difficult for him to do so, devoured as he was by anger. This was the end of his expectations of a busy day. How could he say how often it had occurred before?

As he ruminated, his eye fell upon a clock on the wall. It brought him some slight relief, for he saw that it was already time for Mrs. Clinkscapes' return. With that thought, he went back into the shop and unlocked the door. A woman was just trying it: she proved to be a customer. When Wayfer had supplied her wants, Mrs. Clinkscapes entered. There was a suspicious gaze of inquiry at the young man's face, and then she understood it.

He told her collectedly of what had happened, after which she expressed her

opinion. It was in terms which Wayfer himself could not have strengthened, and it seemed partly to appease him. She assured him that it had never got to this length before.

‘It never shall again, Mrs. Clinkscapes,’ he said, fiercely. ‘I told him that once would be enough, and I’ll keep my word. I’ll come over in the morning to see him.’

Therewith Wayfer left the shop. The incident had greatly disturbed him, especially so because of its coming as a counteraction to his previous exceptional exhilaration. All the thoughts which that triumphal dinner had raised in his mind, and which he was going to discuss with the sage Clinkscapes, were for the moment clouded, and, as he went about the town to transact what business he had, thoughts of a very different colour were uppermost in his mind. The former had savoured somewhat of abstract principles, so far as such a mind as Wayfer’s could travel in

that direction ; but the latter were practical and personal enough. As he went from street to street, he revolved them behind those knitted eyebrows of his.

At last his business was done, and he was ready to leave the town. On the way to his inn he had to cross the market-place, and in doing so was attracted to a crowd in the centre. A cart stood there with its shafts to the ground, and inside it stood a man who seemed to be addressing the multitude. Wayfer drew near, and in doing so caught words which caused him to linger. Presently he had taken up a place amongst the rest of the listeners, and thought no more of his journey homewards. The speaker was indulging in a socialistic harangue.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEW FUEL.

WHETHER that address was the result of some shrewd policy on the part of an energetic local agrarian agitator, or was merely a fortuitous coincidence not directly provided by human enterprise, there was nothing to decide. It was certain that similar meetings had been held there previously upon market-day from time to time, although they had not formerly offered any particular attractions to this one interested listener. If it were, indeed, a device to catch the ears that were already tickled by the oratory within the walls of the county-court, it was for the most part

an unsuccessful one, for with the exception of Michael Wayfer, it is doubtful whether there was any one person present in the crowd who had been of the number interested in the lawsuit. The excitement of the majority of the farmers, (if their inward commotion could at any time warrant that appellation,) had already evaporated, and they were jogging along in their spring-carts over the various roads radiating from the market-town, on their homeward journeys, conscious of little more than their normal degree of dissatisfaction with markets and mankind.

The assembly round the speaker was a motley one, such as any agricultural town, however small, can at a moment call forth. Women largely preponderated. Many labouring men and women from the country were certainly there, but they did not stand long. The subject seemed to afford but little interest to them, and they were constantly moving on, possibly with some

attempt at a jest with a neighbour who was staying. The speaker was an emissary from a town, Birmingham it was reported, and, beyond the purely inflammatory, he did not show the crudest aptitude for gaining the ear of a rustic assembly.

The subject was distribution of the land, mingled with a leaven of general discontent. There was little excuse surely for its not proving attractive to any most haphazard handful of country people. There was, of course, the customary virulence against landlords and rich people in general, driven along in the old hackneyed ruts, and leading up to much gorgeous millennial matter. If the people wanted more they were very hard to please.

Wayfer listened with absolute eagerness. His fury over, Clinkscapes was for the moment forgotten in a newly-awakened spirit of which he had to-day first become conscious. In his mind he had already settled that difficulty of Clinkscapes, and

this, no doubt, had given him additional freedom for renewing his abstract considerations. A widened enthusiasm seemed to steal over him as he listened ; it was no longer the removal of farm produce alone which agitated him, his vision was extended to an ample agrarian horizon to which he had been blind before.

Many comments of approbation or the reverse had, of course, come from the crowd whilst the address was in progress. They had been for the most part interjectional merely, for the time for serious questioning was reserved to the end. When the time at length arrived, and the speaker had wiped his forehead and his lips in readiness to meet demands, there seemed nobody anxious to avail himself of the opportunity. After a repetition of the speaker's request for any form of discussion, and when he was on the point of bringing the meeting to a close, a voice was raised from the crowd.

‘Ye ’ev only spoke, master, about the landlords and such like; but what’s got to say about the farmers? Them be the devils as the labouring man ’ev to fight with.’

Whilst the speaker proceeded to reply to this one solitary question, (in a jejune manner enough, it must be admitted,) Wayfer’s eye was endeavouring to trace out the face of the querist amidst the crowd. The rustic voice had no sooner been raised than it had struck upon Wayfer’s ear as a familiar sound, although for a moment not wholly recognising it. After moving his position and putting a question to a bystander here and there, he succeeded in identifying the man that had spoken. His suspicions proved correct enough, it was Ephraim Riley of Sandy Brook.

After making the discovery, Wayfer seemed desirous of escaping his relative’s observation. It was not a very difficult thing to accomplish, for Riley was, under

no conditions, observant of very much about him, and in these particular circumstances, when his mind had a positive topic of concentration, he was oblivious of everything beyond it. He listened attentively to what the man in the cart had to say to him, and, when the remarks were at an end, he turned away with grumbling dissatisfaction. Wayfer watched him depart from the crowd, and kept his eye upon him until he was lost to sight; then the young farmer elbowed his own way to the side of the cart. There he stood until the conclusion of the proceedings.

The afternoon was beginning to close in when the man at last leaped from his position in the cart. The crowd made way for him to pass through, and he walked away towards the pavement. Before he had gone far Michael Wayfer was at his side, and without any ceremony the two entered into conversation.

‘I wanted to talk with you a bit more

about these things,' said the farmer, as they went along the street. 'Will you come into the "Plough" and sit down; we can't talk out here.'

The man readily acquiesced in the proposition, so they set off to the inn. On the way Wayfer explained who he was, and gave his companion full details of the lawsuit in which he had been involved, and of its termination that day. The interest of the socialist was quickly aroused, and he soon detected the promising nature of the material that had fallen into his hands. He was zealot enough to make the most of the favourable opportunity, and to spare no effort in winning such a valuable ally to the glorious cause of revolution. If he could make a few such converts as this, their affairs would indeed look up. He felt truly that only through such means could they effectually penetrate the heart of the rural districts.

Most patiently the man listened to Way-

fer's outpourings as they sat in a private room in the inn. For more than half-an-hour did they talk there, until the light grew dim around them, and, so far was Wayfer from being sated with the conversation, that as it proceeded it only appeared to whet his appetite the more. At last he rose from his chair and looked out of the window. The gas-lamps and shop-windows were being lighted, and they seemed to be hurrying the short twilight away. The sight brought Wayfer to a determination.

‘I could talk here with you for some hours,’ remarked he, turning to face his companion; ‘but I want to get home. Will you come with me to Shipcombe for to-night? I will give you a bed at my house.’

The suggestion took the other by surprise, and he thought for a minute about it. In doing so he referred to a small note-book which he produced from his

pocket, and as he closed it he gave Wayfer an answer.

‘Yes, I can spare you to-night and to-morrow. I might give an address in the village some time to-morrow before I leave.’

‘That is what I was going to ask. Come, then, and we’ll get the dog-cart.’

Presently the two were driving away from the market-town. It was quite dark when they entered the yard of Sedgecomb. The hour was later than Wayfer’s usual one for returning, but the expectant wife naturally attributed it to the engagements of the lawsuit. That affair had been one of far greater anxiety to her than it had ever been to her husband, and she was tremulously awaiting the result. It was inevitable but that she should connect some feeling of disgrace with the proceedings, for her unsophisticated mind was unable to discriminate between various forms of litigation. Police-court or county-court, Quarter Sessions or Common Pleas :

it was all the same to Joice. They were all 'court' to her, and were inseparably associated with peace-officers and criminals, to say nothing of jail in the background. After a day of much nervous agitation, therefore, what a relief it was to her to hear those cart-wheels upon the stones. Surely he would even give the evening up to her upon such an occasion. The thought of that had once or twice occurred to her, but she had felt bound timorously to repress it.

At the sound of the arrival, Joice flew to the house-door, which she opened wide so as to throw the light into the farm-yard; then she ran out herself, and cried,

'Is it you, Michael?'

'Yes, all right,' he said. 'Jim! Has that fellow Jim gone?'

'No,' said Joice, 'he is in the stable.'

At the same moment the stable-door opened, and a boy came out carrying a lantern.

‘Get the fire alight in the parlour, Joice, and take the tea in there.’

In the dim light which was thrown across the yard, Joice had already discerned that two figures were getting from the cart ; that was quite enough to repress effectually any incipient feeling. She at once turned into the house to carry out orders, and formed no further expectations for the evening.

Wayfer and his new ally followed into the house at leisure ; the dogs showing some symptoms of discontent as they sniffed the legs of the latter. This was very summarily checked by the master. Whilst the inner room was being made ready, the two men stood by the large kitchen fire and talked of general matters. Before many minutes had elapsed, they were seated before a substantial meal for which both seemed fully prepared.

The guest seemed particularly anxious to do justice to the viands. He was a

civil-spoken man enough in these private relations ; apparently one of the ill-fed clerk species, who had been beaten throughout life in the struggle for food, and who, but for having fallen upon these deplorable times, might have been a really useful member of the community. In spite of his polite attentions to Mrs. Wayfer, he could scarcely succeed in extracting from her more than monosyllabic replies to his questions. Joice did not even venture to ask her husband directly as to the result of the legal proceedings, but in the course of the conversation she incidentally gathered it, and was able consequently to put her mind at rest upon the point of prospective jail. It was a positive relief to her when the meal was ended, and she was at liberty to go back to her menial occupations. She employed herself with them until nearly bed-time.

Notwithstanding Joice's resignation of all thought of solace from her husband's

company that night, Michael did intend to give her a short time of his own unalloyed self. The two servants went to bed early, and the socialist visitor, pleading a hard day's work, expressed a wish to do the same. Wayfer could not civilly gainsay it, so that soon after nine o'clock he led the way, with candlestick in hand, up the creaking staircase and along the dreary passage to the desolate chamber where Jonathan Wayfer had died. Here he hoped his guest would be comfortable, (had the latter been either a man of humour or a man accustomed to luxury he would most likely have looked at his host twice as he heard the hope expressed ;) and shook hands heartily in wishing him good-night. When alone, after inspecting the obscure corners into which the candle was unable to throw its rays, the socialist looked at the lock ; there was one on the door, but no key in it, he therefore took the precaution of putting the back of a heavy old oak

chair under the door-handle and all available crockery-ware upon the seat. After constructing these means of defence, he got into bed, presumably to sleep, and not improbably to dream that he had acquired possession of some king's dwelling, such as his waking thoughts were so much occupied withal.

When Wayfer had descended the stairs, he went to Joice in the kitchen : he found her plucking fowls for sale at the Stores. She looked up pleased as he entered, but he said nothing. He pulled a chair up to the sinking fire, and leaned forward with his elbows on his knees : the wife looked furtively at him.

‘ You are glad of the way it has ended, Michael, aren't you ? ’ she said at last, as he showed no inclination to break the silence. ‘ You won't lose any money through it. ’

‘ O no ; that's all right. I'm not thinking about that now. It's that shop.

When I went in this afternoon I found Clinkscales dead drunk and giving gold away instead of copper. I shall get on well like that. I told him the first time he did it he should go ; and so he shall. I can do without him now.'

Again a few minutes' silence, almost appalling silence, broken only by the low moaning of the wind around the house. All within was still as the grave.

'Yes, he shall go,' said Wayfer again, in a tone of determination, and raising his shoulders to the back of the chair. 'If he doesn't always get drunk on the premises, he steals the cash and drinks at the pubs. I'll turn him out straight: and, Joice, I want you to go there and look after the shop.'

'Me, Michael!' she exclaimed, dropping her hands into her lap.

'Yes: it's light enough work ; lighter than you get here. You'll be thinking about the dairy and other things here,' he continued, seeing the look upon her face,

which he didn't understand. 'I've thought all about it. I'll arrange with sister Riley to come up here and do that : she's as good a hand at it as you.'

'Do you want me to go and live at the shop?'

'Yes, of course. You'll like living in the town, won't you? It's far livelier than in this hole. I must have somebody at the shop that I know all about and can trust, and I can't afford yet to take a proper manager. You'll soon get used to it: there's nothing in it. The house is a comfortable place to live in, and you shall have a little girl to help you with the house-work. You——'

As he spoke, Joice had left her work, and now stood before him. She looked at him with a half-stupefied gaze.

'And will you live here?' she said, with difficulty uttering the words.

'Of course I shall. Who's to look after the farm?'

‘O, Michael, I cannot leave you! Don’t send me away!’

As she spoke the words, she burst into tears, and raised her apron to her eyes to hide them.

‘Why, Joice, I thought you wanted to help me in everything! You always used to say so: and now the very first time I ask you to do anything for me you go on like this. How will it hurt you? You will have far less work to do; not a quarter of what you have to do here. I shall often look in during the week—at any rate, on market day—and you can come here every Sunday. I will drive over the dog-cart to fetch you.’

‘Don’t send me, Michael!’ she sobbed. ‘I—I—can’t live there. I will do anything here; twice as much work;—anything you want;—but—but let me live with you!’

Again she knelt at his knee, as once in her life she had done before; but he was

not so patient upon this occasion. He rose from his chair and drew back from her touch.

‘Don’t be a fool, Joice! What harm am I doing to you? You know that I can’t go on without that shop, and I have nobody but you to look after it. You have always been sensible before, and I didn’t expect you to go on like this. Don’t make me angry, for I don’t want to be angry with you. I might be sending you a hundred miles away. Now, dry your eyes and talk sensibly.’

It was some minutes before the young woman was able to do so. She leaned over the seat of the chair he had vacated with her face buried in her apron. The wind continued to moan outside, and rain-drops were heard upon the window-panes; but the other sound was more mournful still.

Presently Joice rose from her kneeling posture, and returned in silence to her

former work. Wayfer's eyes followed her, but he did not immediately speak. Joice herself was the first to do so.

‘When do you want me to go, Michael?’ she said, with a lingering uncertainty of voice.

‘As soon as I can arrange with sister Riley. I shall be busy to-morrow, but if I have time I will see her. I think it will be best for you to have Mrs. Clinkscapes with you for two or three weeks to put you into the work. You had better stop that work for to-night.’

‘I will finish this one.’

Wayfer continued his talk of the new arrangements, but Joice scarce heard what he was saying. This sentence of banishment was the most serious blow that she could have received, and it had numbed alike her heart and her intellect. She went on mechanically with her employment, hearing the flow of her husband's tongue with the same indefinite sense of

depression as she heard the moaning wind : one fell upon her with little more articulateness than the other. If a question were asked her, she looked up stupefied ; and the question had to be repeated.

When she had finished the bird upon which she had been engaged, her husband bade her pull up her chair to the fire, and she obeyed. There was no life in her movements ; many a new-fashioned automatic doll shows more vitality in going through its accomplishments than did Joice at that moment. She fixed her eyes upon the white ashes in the grate, which had little more life than she, and Wayfer continued his remarks.

They did not long sit there. The husband soon saw that he could get no sensible attention from Joice, and this only served to irritate him. He was quite truthful in saying that he did not wish to be angry with her. He had never been really so since their marriage,—credit for

which he, no doubt, took to himself,—and the present moment seemed an especially unfavourable one to begin. It was as well then to end the colloquy. After taking a candle to examine the doors, and after satisfying himself upon one or two other points about the premises, Michael led the way upstairs.

The house had for a long time been in darkness and silence, still one of the inmates lay awake. Law-suits and socialism were not enough to deprive Wayfer of sleep, so that his head had not long been on the pillow before there was unmistakable evidence of his being in a sound slumber. It is curious that to-night, perhaps for the first time in her married life, Joice was aware of a sense of satisfaction at being thus left watching alone. It was that sense of being alone which had revived in her the capacity of looking collectedly at her situation,—or, at least

consciously,—and of thus discerning, more vividly than at any time hitherto, how terribly lonely she really was.

As Joice lay there, staring at her own heart in the darkness, she heard the clock downstairs strike yet again. It was but one solitary stroke this time, and the sound of it sent a tremor through the listener as it vibrated through the hollow, quiet house. At that moment, some rats, which had been gnawing the rafters of the ceiling, scuttered away to another corner, and seemed to come down inside the wall just at Joice's head. This made her bury her face in the clothes, and for some minutes she did not venture to look forth again.

The feelings which harassed Joice to-night were of a complex nature: love, fear, grief, and other emotions were mingled in her mind, and one after another they were severally uppermost in her thoughts. Despite his attitude of cold indifference from the very day of

their marriage, Joice had never felt the slightest suspicion of wavering in her love towards her husband. She had attributed any feeling of disappointment or unsatisfied sentiment which she had experienced to her own foolishness, and had tried to discipline herself to live without it. At this moment she loved the man sleeping by her side as firmly as she had loved him twelve months ago ; but in another respect to-night had wrought a difference in her. She mused upon the stunning effect which his sentence of banishment had had upon her, and this she could not attribute to her own foolishness. She plainly discerned that it was only her love for him which wrought the feeling, and from it followed an inference more crushing than all. Its effect was no doubt the more deadly, because it was the means which turned a hitherto tremulously resisted doubt into a wholly irresistible certainty : her husband no longer loved her. Half-consciously and

half-unconsciously Joice had been fencing with that ugly consideration from the night of the man's proposal to her; not until to-night, when the point had pierced her heart, had she known, or at any rate admitted, how genuine was the duel. If he had loved her, ever so little, she thought, this decision would have been impossible; he could not have sent her to live at a distance from himself.

This was the universal back sheet of cloud which covered her whole sky, other things stood out but as the dark, lower fragments floating on before it. They were not in themselves insignificant, but seemed so in comparison of this greater matter. One of the chief of these minor evils was a nervous fear as to her own ability to grapple with the task which her husband was setting before her. Mere quantity of general work would never have subdued her; the young woman's life as mistress of Sedgecomb had already

sufficiently proved that : but when it came to engaging in unknown work, and work which to her inexperienced mind seemed of a highly technical nature, Joice felt herself quail before the outlook. She had been born and bred in this remote country village, and even amongst this rustic community her parents had been always somewhat retiring and self-contained. Joice had occasionally been into the market town, of course, but not to such an extent as even yet to feel at home in it. It is not strange, therefore, that the thought of being cast there alone, in such a public capacity as that of a shopkeeper, too, should be little short of appalling to her imagination. The whole thought seemed so alien and incomprehensible to her, that at times she could not accept it as a reality. The weight of tears, though, would generally convince her. Joice was not such a highly imaginative being as to weep over imaginary troubles; and she knew it.

When she again uncovered her face and looked out into the room, she started with fright. Upon her half-opened eyes, dimmed and weakened by her many tears, a great light fell. All the room was alight. She looked towards the window, and there met the full glance of the moon peering in at her between the blind and the window-sash. The wind which had been gradually rising throughout the night, and driving occasionally whole bucketfuls of rain against the window, had at last rent the clouded sky, and was now scattering the broken fragments away to the north-east.

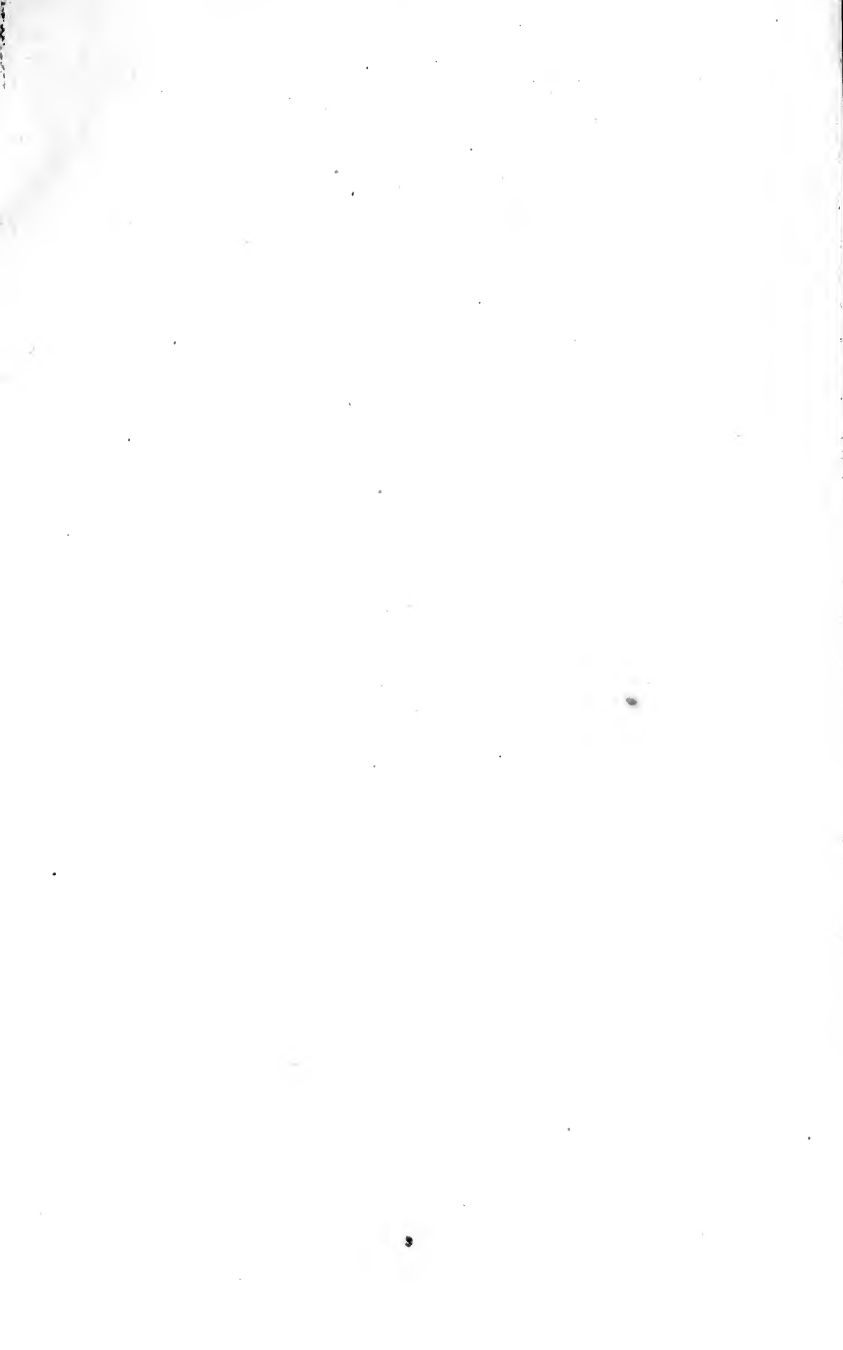
As Joice regarded the moon, it seemed to bring to her some sense of companionship. It was very like a bright unearthly face, anxious by its glance to lighten the darkness of the chamber, and the appearance of it drew her thoughts into another channel. After watching it for some moments, she was aware that it was creeping from her. When she could

no longer see the orb, she moved herself quietly and sat up in the bed. In this position she could put her hand into the light and watch the shadow thrown across the coverlet. When it had crept too far for this she got out stealthily, and walked across to the window. She pushed the blind aside and looked upon the scene without. The moon rode in a clear starlit space, and massive clouds were rolling up towards it. All the earth shone with moisture, and the drops which clung to the creeper by the window-pane were like little pearls. Joice saw the branches of the beech-tree swaying in the wind, and heard the roaring which it made. Whilst she watched, she felt the darkness coming again upon her, and looking up saw the fringe of the foremost cloud advancing quickly before the moon. Then she turned, and flitted, like a ray of moonlight, to the bedside. Some sound arrested her, she listened breathlessly, and heard a cow low

in the byre. The dog in the house answered with a suppressed growl, and all was silent again. As Joice's heart beat fast, she sank by the bedside upon her knees, and there sought balm for the bitterness of her soul. Presently she crept again into her place, and in her tears she fell asleep.

Long before daybreak she was about her work.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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